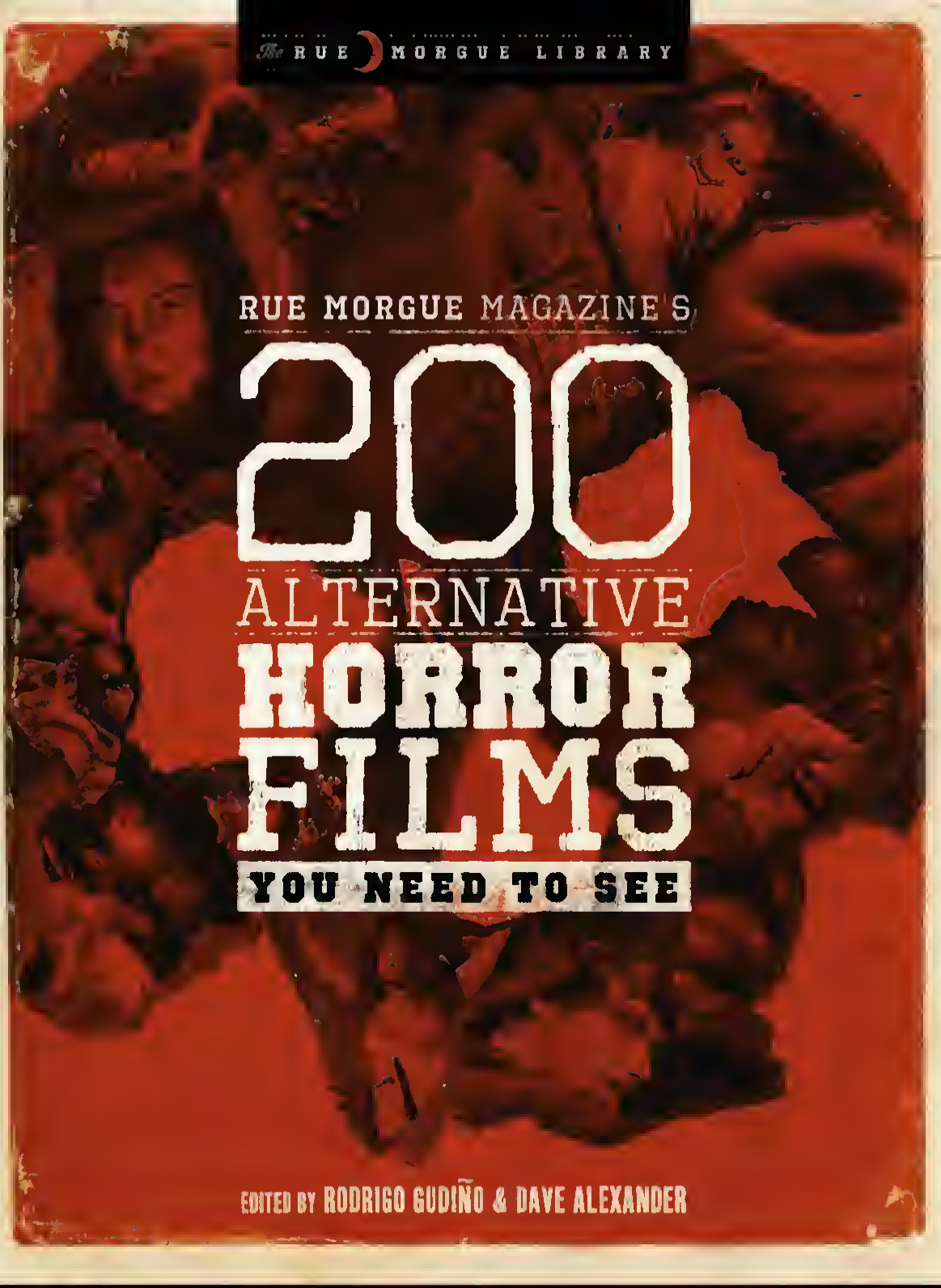
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FILMS
YOU NEED TO SEE
EDITED BY RODRIGO GUDIÑO & DAVE ALEXANDER

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HORROR FANS TEND TO VENERATE THEIR FILMS.

That's why, the average genre lover's top film list tends to resemble all the others put out by the mainstream. Guaranteed you'll find *The Exorcist*, *Psycho*, *The Shining* and maybe *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* vying for the scariest film of all time. You'll also probably find the likes of *Alien*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *Halloween* and *Jaws* on there too, followed by *Rosemary's Baby*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *Frankenstein*, *The Thing*... you know the drill. They're all essential viewing, but the problem is that we don't need to be told to watch those movies. We've already seen them.

That's where *Rue Morgue Magazine's 200 Horror Films You Need to See* comes in. This is a look at genre titles you probably haven't seen and maybe didn't even know existed. In other words, a veluable list for you (seasoned or neophyte horror film lover, it makes no difference) of features that we think demand your attention. A daunting task, we realize, considering the ever-increasing number of films on the market every year, and so a couple of disclaimers are in order.

First, we put this book together with an aim to unearth those films that fell through the cracks, to look a little closer at the filmographies of well-known directors for those forgotten gems, to celebrate some

really great foreign and indie flicks that just didn't get the exposure they deserved and to reconsider some titles that were unfairly maligned upon initial release or perhaps written off for whatever reason.

If you've explored Hitchcock's oeuvre, we hope you'll discover a some titles in the same suspense-filled vein here. If you love the output of Hammer Studios, we've mined their back catalogue for some titles you may have missed. If you've ever wondered if the sequels to *Psycho*, *The Amityville Horror* and *Phantasm* were worth your time, we'll tell you that they are indeed, and why. Can't get enough slasher movies, zombie flicks or ghost stories? We've got you covered. And along the way, we hope you'll discover some filmmakers with multiple entries on our list who deserve a larger following, including Australia's Richard Franklin, American indie director J.T. Petty and Stuart Gordon, who has made many fine films aside from *Re-Animator*.

Second, this is far from a definitive list, we could have easily tripled it in size. Nor did we rank the films, opting instead for an easy-to-use alphabetical listing. And, yes, we realize that just putting together something like this is contentious in the eyes of the horror faithful who will decry certain choices, bemoan the absence of others and question just how "alternative" some of these films really are. But that's no reason not to do it, and hopefully we've justified our selections in a genre that is so vast and rich that it contains every shade of grey.

The great thing is, even if you are a regular *Rue Morgue* reader, we've not only added scores of new reviews to the ones we've pulled from our archives, we've also expanded some of the entries on the list to include new interviews with some of our favourite filmmakers. Guillermo del Toro tells us why he loves Pupi Avati's *The Arcane Sorcerer*; Fred Dekker revisits his zombie/alien/parasite mash-up *Night of the Creeps*; Stuart Gordon dishes on his underrated Lovecraftian creeper *Dagon*; *The Blair Witch Project* co-creator Eduardo Sánchez details his affection for sasquatch movie *The Legend of Boggy Creek*; Larry Cohen discusses his truly out there *God Told Me Too*; and there's a helluva lot more.

We also realized that certain subgenres are enjoyed by their own specific criteria, so we asked *Rue Morgue* writers to come up with their own top ten lists for slasher killfests, family-friendly horror films, foreign zombie flicks, vampire movies, gore shows, made-for-TV picks and even so-bad-they're-good guilty pleasures. They're all picked independently of our main list, so you'll find a bit of overlap, and that's just fine, as it showcases certain films from new angles.

Lastly, a huge thanks to everyone in the *Rue Morgue* family who worked so hard to put this together. We hope it expands your genre horizons, and gives you that fright fix that us horror lovers are always on the hunt for.

RODRIGO GUDIÑO AND **DAVE ALEXANDER**
RUE MORGUE HOUSE OF HORROR
NOVEMBER 2012

13 TZAMETI

2005/FRANCE/93 MIN
STARRING GEORGES BABLUANI
AURELIEN RECOING AND FRED ULYSSE
DIRECTED BY GELA BABLUANI

In the true French fashion that we've come to adore, *13 Tzameti* is an unbearably tense, supremely stylish and utterly nihilistic thriller. The nasty little film recounts the misadventures of Sebastien (Georges Baluani), a financially challenged young man who intercepts a letter intended for his recently deceased employer that contains instructions on where a mysterious meeting is to be held. Believing he'll score some easy cash, Sebastien follows the directions only to learn, to his absolute horror, that he's entered into a type of Russian roulette and there's nothing he can do to get out of it.

In this more lethal variation of the game, thirteen men stand in a circle, each pointing a gun at the head of the man in front of him – sort of like a homicidal circle jerk. In round one, they each place a single bullet in the chamber and simultaneously pull the trigger. Whoever manages to survive with his hypothalamus intact forms a new circle, loads two bullets in his gun, and on it goes until there's only one man left standing. All the while, a gaggle of sadists bet on the outcome.

Shot in beautifully stark, high-contrast black and white, *13 Tzameti* paints an unsettling portrait of a world completely devoid of human empathy, and boasts a terrific cast of French character actors who all look as though they've been chain-smoking since infancy. Director Gela Babluani also helmed the English-language, American remake of the film simply titled *13* but you won't need to bother with it once you've seen the original.

STUART F. ANDREWS

ABBY

1974/USA/89 MIN
STARRING CAROL SPEED, WILLIAM MARSHALL AND TERRY CARTER
DIRECTED BY WILLIAM GIRDLER

Kentucky-born exploitation auteur William Girdler followed up his 1973 slasher *Three on a Meathook* with a trio of blaxploitation films, the best of which was *Abby*. Though it's often dismissed as an *Exorcist* clone, this is a demonically entertaining camp gem that sneaks in a few sly observations about race relations and sexual politics in a conservative Southern community.

Blacula star William Marshall plays Dr. Williams, a dashiki-sporting archaeologist who accidentally unleashes a Nigerian sex spirit named Eshu. On the loose and on the make, Eshu winds up in Louisville, Kentucky, where it slowly takes over the body of Abby (Carol Speed), a young marriage counsellor newly married to Dr. Williams' preacher son. Once a docile wife and meek do-gooder, Abby morphs into an aggressive sexual predator capable of literally scaring white people to death. With Abby's husband in tow, Dr. Williams tracks the young

13 Tzameti

woman to the world's most depressing nightclub for – there's no other way to say it – a disco exorcism.

Abby did very well upon its release, but was promptly exorcised from theatres when Warner Bros. sued for copyright infringement, claiming it was a blatant rip-off of their demonic hit. They were right, of course; Gurdler never made any pretense about riding *The Exorcist*'s pea-soup-stained coattails. But stripping William Peter Blatty's tale of its Catholic trappings and replacing them with Baptist righteousness and West African spiritualism was a brilliant stroke, and makes for an unforgettable film. APRIL SNELLINGS

THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES

1971/UK, USA/94 MIN
STARRING VINCENT PRICE, JOSEPH COTTEN AND PETER JEFFREY
DIRECTED BY ROBERT FUEST

Before there was *Saw* there was *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*. Though it would be a stretch to say that this horror comedy classic serves as some kind of proto-torture porn, you have to think Jigsaw would have wet dreams over some of the elaborate murder scenarios concocted by Dr. Anton Phibes, played by the iconic Vincent Price in a deliciously hammy performance.

Believing the death of his wife (played in an uncredited role by Hammer queen Caroline Munro) is the fault of incompetent doctors, Phibes plots their deaths based on the Ten Plagues of Egypt from the Old Testament, and that's where the fun begins. Boils, bats, and frogs all help form the basis of Phibes' revenge, with the most over-the-top coming from locusts, when the bad doctor drills a hole over a sleeping nurse's head, dumps sticky goo over her face, then opens up a jar of the buggers who promptly snack on her flesh 'til she's nothing but a bare skull!

Adding to the film's charm is its classic art deco set design, witty humour and Joseph Cotten (*Shadow of a Doubt*) as Dr. Vesalius, the head surgeon who operated on Phibes' wife, who proves an equal match for Price in terms of screen presence. That's saying alot, because the high camp and dark coolness that Price brings to the screen makes Dr. Phibes one of his all time greatest characters. AARON VON LUPTON

ALIEN 3: THE ASSEMBLY CUT

1992 2003/USA/145 MIN
STARRING SIGOURNEY WEAVER, CHARLES S. DUTTON AND CHARLES DANCE
DIRECTED BY DAVID FINCHER

Often mistakenly billed as the "Director's Cut," *Alien 3: The Assembly Cut* was in fact "restored" from the workprint by editor David Crowther without David Fincher's participation. Nonetheless, this expanded version better approximates the visionary filmmaker's spectacularly uncommercial intentions and is over 30 minutes longer than the theatrical release.

Picking the story up after the reassuring climax of *Aliens*, Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) crash lands on Fiorina "Fury" 161, a wind-stripped prison planet populated by a rabble of double-Y chromosome murderers and rapists who have embraced Christianity. Ripley discovers that

Alien 3: The Assembly Cut

5150 ELM'S WAY

2009/CANADA/110 MIN
STARRING MARC-ANDRE GRONDIN, NORMAND D'AMOUR AND SONIA VACHON
DIRECTED BY ERIC TESSIER

French horror films from France are celebrated by genre fans worldwide. French horror films from Quebec, however, are virtually unknown outside of the province. Case in point: *5150 Elm's Way* (a.k.a. *5150 Rue des Ormes*), an adaptation of a novel by Patrick Senécal, who's often called "The Stephen King of Quebec."

Directed by Éric Tessier (who previously adapted Senécal's *Evil Words*), it stars Quebec A-lister Marc-André Grondin as Yannick, a film student who falls off his bike while out shooting and seeks help at a very average-looking suburban home. After accidentally stumbling across a bleeding man in one of the upstairs rooms, he's taken captive by the family patriarch, Jacques, a pious vigilante who kills junkies, pedophiles and anyone else who isn't "righteous." Jacques is bound by his moral code and won't kill Yannick, but he can't release him either, so he makes him a prisoner.

In between foiled escape attempts and run-ins with Jacques' similarly crazed family – including his bloodthirsty daughter Michelle (Mylène St-Sauveur) – the men play chess. Their sanity-sapping rivalry culminates in a finale so twisted, fearless and violent (to say more would spoil things), it stands beside the likes of *High Tension*, *Inside* and *Martyrs* for sheer gutsiness. Senécal's script is full of nasty surprises, while Tessier's inventive direction takes us inside Yannick's deteriorating mind, showing us the psychological trauma that erupts into physical trauma.

5150 Elm's Way is just waiting to be discovered and celebrated by genre fans. We asked Tessier to tell us more about his powerful yet under-appreciated film.

5150 Elm's Way

How did you discover Patrick Senecal?

Patrick is a [illegible] writer and I love stories; I love good stories, whatever kind they are, actually. That's what first drew me to him, the way he tells you stories that really put you on the edge of your seat. The first time I heard about him was through a very good friend of mine who used to do some DP work. His mother was, like, 60-years-old and reading his novel *Sur le seuil* [a.k.a. *Evil Words*] which was my first film translated into English. I totally fell in love with the book. Patrick was not well known at that time, around 1999, so I called him up and said, "I would like to adapt your story to make my first feature." And he said, "You'll have to talk to my editor," so I convinced the guy to lend me the rights for a year and a half, and then I found a producer and Patrick and I started working together.

5150 Elm's Way, like many of Senecal's stories, contains a strong theme of men struggling with moral codes. Is that what drew you to his work?

All good stories are about conflicts, and that's an example of a very psychological one – you are not fighting a big evil guy somewhere, you are fighting your own evil. You are in confrontation with your own set of rules, and that's where the story comes from. I am very drawn to everything that is psychological, that's always what I love because I think it is very intimate and near to everyone of us. If it's well done, you can really identify with it, and when you add a layer of fantasy or horror, that's when you get the most interesting mix. I do not have anything against good slasher horror, where you have fun, but that's more like a roller-coaster ride or an amusement park to me. When it touches the soul, and when it touches morality and the psychological side, that's when it's the hardest to translate to the screen.

So then, what are some horror films or filmmakers that have influenced you in particular?

The big one for me is Kubrick for sure. That's the first thing that comes to my mind. I like what is more edgy. I like to go into the skin of the story. More psychological stuff, for sure. Polanski, *Rosemary's Baby* is a good movie to watch, knowing what's in the head of the main character. It's amazing. That's the kind of stuff I like. … And two years ago I was on the Fantasia film festival jury and I had a chance to see much more recent stuff that I was really thrown by, including *A Serbian Film* and *The Life and Death of a Porno Gang*.

Like those last two movies, the violence in your film is particularly shocking and messy when it happens, especially in contrast to the chess games played throughout the movie, which are very controlled and non-violent.

Violence has to be in a movie like this, but it has to have a purpose, to serve something. Many people were too horrified by the ending – you know we were shooting [one of the characters] in the face almost. Some people couldn't take it, but to us the purpose was that the main character has to be shocked, to be thrown awry. If it is just a little thing, it won't be enough, we needed that jolt to put him out of service. The thing that makes it feel really violent is the psychological aspect – sometimes the movie contains small amounts of violence but not something that is really mean, like chopping someone's arm for the fun of it. The most violent character is Michelle, actually. Her father justifies being violent, [believing that] bad people should pay. To Michelle, this is all bullshit, she is much more dangerous than her father because if someone is in her way, she takes them out.

Extreme horror movies from France have become really popular with genre fans all over the world. Yet 5150 is barely known outside of Quebec. Why is this?

We don't make many genre movies in Quebec. Second, English Canadian movies rarely come through here. I think it is the same thing too on the other side, [the rest of Canada] doesn't get many Quebec films. I don't know a much better way to tell you what the situation is, but there is kind of a wall between us. I have a manager in the US, and as much as the company loved *Evil Words*, they really hated this movie, and I don't know why. You never know what is going to come through, there is no way to try and make sense of what can be the [trajectory] of a movie. Maybe in a few years people may say it's great. You never know.

DAVE ALEXANDER

both Hicks and Newt have been killed, and, unbeknownst to her, one surviving alien has also come along for the ride, and another gestates inside her own body.

Hobbled by delays, constant script changes and studio politicking, the theatrical version of *Alien 3* was a patchwork effort. The extended cut neatly ties-up several dangling plot threads, places more emphasis on the film's religious subtext and sketches the interchangeable characters with more clarity (although most critics insist that Fincher always proposed to relegate story and character development in favour of mood and unrelenting nihilism). The opening credits sequence – which so infuriated fans with its summary revelation that Newt and Hicks were mere grease spots – now segues into a more detailed look at the barren planet and its inhabitants. In the revised cut, Ripley is washed up on the shore rather than being discovered in the wreckage of her ship and, oddly, the xenomorph bursts forth from an ox instead of a dog.

In this seemingly endless age of play-it-safe sequels and insipid remakes, it's staggering that a major studio sanctioned such an unremittingly grim entry to one of their most profitable franchises. A stark, pitiless gift of a horror movie, *Alien 3* is not perfect, but is fully-deserving of re-evaluation. **MICHAEL BOYLE**

ALUCARDA

1977/MEXICO/85 MIN
STARRING CLAUDIO BROOK, TINA ROMERO AND SUSANA KAMINI
DIRECTED BY JUAN LOPEZ MOCTEZUMA

You don't need to be a fan of 1970s Mexican cinema or a follower of director Juan Lopez Moctezuma – director of *Mansion of Madness*, producer of Jodorowsky's *El Topo* – to be bewitched by *Alucarda*.

If you're looking for a blast of blood and nudity within a story that pays homage to Bram Stoker and the Marquis de Sade, this 1977 classic has you covered. Alucarda (Tina Romero) is a lot like any teen misanthrope stuck in an all-girls Catholic school. You know the type: dresses completely in black, skips classes, dabbles in magic and kissing girls, has orgies in the forest and tries to rape her priest at confession. Okay, something might be a bit off with this girl. Could it be… Satan?

But there's more than mere possession amiss in this English-language horror about teen "girlfriends" gone bad in a convent. We can be pretty sure of that from the moment the innocent Justine (Susana Kamini) arrives and is greeted by nuns wrapped like mummies

in blood soaked habits Justine doesn't seem to notice, but then again, she's innocent The new mates thus set about frolicking in the woods, tumbling and giggling a lot. That is until an encounter with a hunchbacked French gypsy who looks suspiciously like a goat (Claudio Brook of *Cronos*, who also plays the good doctor) opens the gates of hell and transforms Alucarda's mischievous tendencies into full-blown evil From then on, it's just ear-splitting shrieking!

Moctezuma deftly weaves witchcraft, devil worship, Catholicism and vampirism – reread the title, backwards – in stylish scenes that offer subtext without sacrificing story The result is creepy, with maximum opportunities for blood-drenched scenarios you'll want to watch over and over again Whether your blood fetish is flagellation, knives, crucifixion or biting, it's all there in deep, vibrant reds (One particularly stunning scene gives new meaning to the term "blood bath") By its chaotic climax, it's obvious *Alucarda* directly influenced such well-known films as *Carrie*, *The Exorcist* and *Firestarter* LUISA LADDUCEUR

AMER

2009/FRANCE, BELGIUM/90 MIN
STARRING CASSANDRA FORET
CHARLOTTE EUGENE GUIBEAUD AND MARIE BOS
DIRECTED BY HELENE CATTET
AND BRUNO FORZANI

An unseen killer sensuously pulls on black leather gloves. A gleaming straight-razor is freed from its sheath, unfolded, and held menacingly The blade rips through fabric, looking for its target An eye opens wide with shock Enticed by such vivid *giallo* imagery, filmmaking couple Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani have created *Amer* – their first feature – as a fetishistic dream world.

Essentially a triumvirate of short films, it depicts three stages in the life of a woman named Ana In the first segment, she's a child (played by Cassandra Forêt) living with her parents in a creaky, old mansion As the family grieves the recent passing of her grandfather, the girl's witch-like grandmother lays in bed like a corpse, occasionally rising to roam the room in a black veil, peering through keyholes to truly unsettling effect Long, beautifully composed shots – some tinted in rich hues of red, blue, violet and green – mixed with shadows, reflections and minimal dialogue, lend *Amer*'s first chapter both the dream-like quality of a distant childhood memory and the nightmarish atmosphere of a classic Mario Bava film.

In the second sequence, a teenaged Ana (Charlotte Eugene Guibeaud) accompanies her mother through dark passageways to an appointment Left alone outside, the teenager is watched by a group of young men, and she watches them back, becoming aware of her own budding sensuality A collage of provocative close-ups of her eyes and body is underscored with a sense of impending doom as a soundtrack comprised of laboured breathing and sighs provides a lush and erotic sense of unease

Finally, a leather-clad taxi driver gives a full-grown Ana (Marie Bos) a lift back to her dilapidated childhood home in this third vignette, which simmers with tension and takes us into full-blown giallo territory Every curve of Ana's figure is ogled by both the camera and the driver, who leers menacingly from the rearview mirror Alone in the decaying manor, that night she's stalked by a knife-wielding assailant through the grounds, leading to a crescendo of violence.

Amer presents a mysterious world full of menace and eroticism, brought to life via monochromatic colours,

shadowy rooms, ghostly sounds and images of sharp steel and soft skin – all accompanied by a soundtrack right out of a '70s-era Italian genre movie. It all makes for an unforgettable, unsettling arthouse giallo experience. **SHADE ROPE**

AMITYVILLE II: THE POSSESSION

1982/USA/100 MIN
STARRING JAMES OLSON, BURT YOUNG AND RUTANYA ALDA
DIRECTED BY DAMIANO DAMIANI

When *Amityville II: The Possession* was first released back in 1982, it was dismissed as a disposable sequel and all but forgotten. But the film had been touched by the hand of Italy's great unspoken master of horror, and would go on to influence a new wave of Japanese horror cinema, which in turn made a splash in North America.

Directed by Damiano Damiani, who made the *Exorcist* clone *The Tempter* (aka *The Devil Is a Woman*, 1975), *The Possession* also benefitted handsomely by an uncredited rewrite by golden age Italian horror icon Dardano Sacchetti (*A Bay of Blood*, *The Beyond* and *House By the Cemetery*, among many others).

Not surprisingly, the Italian stamp on *The Possession* is unmistakable. Aside from the rough, shadowy look of the film, its extensive use of Hitchcock/giallo-inspired first-person camera, the inclusion of nudity and graphic depiction of murder, *The Possession* emphasized the Catholic battle between good and evil with a violent *Exorcist*-style exorcism. However, the key ingredient was the movie's abject depiction of evil; it took the sickening smells, fly infestation and black liquid from the first *Amityville* and rolled it into one exceptionally foul, slimy ghoul-infested secret room – a sickening place remarkably similar to the infamous well at the centre of the original Japanese version of *The Ring*, which kicked off the J-Horror craze. The director of that film, Hideo Nakata, has credited *The Possession* as a direct influence on it. See for yourself how this unexpectedly effective sequel gave the American haunted house movie an Italian touch that would influence Japanese ghost stories, which would in turn assert themselves on the American haunted house movie. The old adage is true: whatever comes around, goes around. **DAVE ALEXANDER**

ANGST

1983/AUSTRIA/83 MIN
STARRING ERWIN LEDER
SILVIA RADENREITHER AND EDITH ROSSET
DIRECTED BY GERALD KARGL

The 1986 cult classic *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* gets a lot of good press in North America for being a hard hitting depiction of modern day mass murderers. But compared to Gerald Kargl's little-known shocker from 1983, it's about as confrontational as an ABC After School Special. Few films capture the chaotic, grimy pathology of the serial killer more powerfully than *Angst*.

Ghoulish Austrian actor Erwin Leder (*Taxidermia*) stars as The Psychopath, released from prison after ten years for murdering his mother. The time behind bars has only

Amityville II: The Possession

ALLIGATOR

1980/USA/91 MIN
STARRING ROBERT FORSTER, ROBIN RIKER AND MICHAEL V GAZZO
DIRECTED BY LEWIS TEAGUE

If you insist on watching only one "nature-runs-amok" film tonight make sure it's *Alligator*. Few horror movies are as subversive and suspenseful as this spirited reworking of *Jaws* from screenwriter John Sayles and director Lewis Teague.

Opening with an adorable pet alligator being flushed down the toilet, *Alligator* is the story of David Madison (Robert Forster), a balding detective investigating a case involving two dismembered bodies discovered in the sewers. After a fellow officer is eaten by the creature (which has now grown to monstrous size due to the hormone-experiment waste materials dumped illegally into the sewers), Madison attempts to convince the authorities that a gigantic reptile stalks beneath the city. When a missing reporter's camera is recovered from the sewers containing photographs of the animal, police attempt to flush the alligator out. However, it escapes through a manhole and resumes its savage rampage on the city streets, ending with a bloody climax at a wedding.

Succinctly stated, *Alligator* is lean, mean and, er, green (the ecological subtext is fairly pronounced). Teague and Sayles understand that a movie such as theirs operates best when its roots are showing – and indulge the follicle metaphor themselves with a running joke about Madison's receding hairline. Often unfairly bracketed with the similarly themed – but appreciably poorer – *Grizzly*, *Alligator* is in fact far closer to the playful, ironic edge of *Piranha* (also scripted by Sayles). That said, Teague is not giving us a mere parodic reinterpretation of *Jaws* – this beast has real bite!

Rue Morgue grabs a flashlight and wades back through the sewers with the 74 year-old filmmaker to chart the making of his witty monster flick.

How were the alligator effects realized?

Before I was hired, [producer Brandon] Chase had already built the model for the alligator as a sales tool. It had been constructed by an industrial designer who had cleverly made the framework out of bamboo and rattan, which was then covered with a light rubber skin. Apparently, this had worked well but it had taken them several years to raise the money for the film and in the meantime the alligator had been stored in a warehouse. By the time I came on board, and we took the alligator down off the hooks it was hanging on and inspected it, the rubber was literally disintegrating before our eyes. So we started work on a new full-scale alligator suit that could contain two men with their legs in the fore-legs and rear-legs of the creature. I'd hired a special effects person who decided to protect himself by over-engineering the alligator. The mould for the first model still existed so they fabricated a new rubber skin about four times as thick as it had originally been, and put it around an aluminium steel framework. It was meant to be durable and was hinged to move properly. The consequence was that it weighed about 250 lbs and had poor mobility. Even though the two guys who were operating it looked like NFL football players, when they got in the suit they had a hard time moving the damn

Alligator

thing around. It was so hot in there they were only good for maybe ten minutes at a time. Have you ever seen a real alligator walking?

Only in nature documentaries on television.

Then you may have noticed that when alligators walk they take long strides, extending their legs far to the front and far to the back with their bellies close to the ground. I remember the first time we shot a test with the alligator in the parking lot of a big effects house in the San Fernando Valley. By the time we'd arranged a couple of cameras to photograph the creature, and waited for the guys to get zipped-up inside the suit, we had attracted a huge crowd. They all wanted to see what this thing would do. When I gave the guys the order to start walking, this gigantic alligator took these little mincing steps and everybody laughed their asses off! I realised two things at that moment: this movie will have to be a comedy and I must hide the monster as much as possible.

What sorts of tricks did you employ for the close-ups of the alligator?

We built an alligator head that was mounted on a wheelbarrow with two wheels and handles behind it. If somebody was running with this contraption we could dolly with the head and give the impression that the creature was moving towards something. On several occasions we also used little real-life alligators on miniature sets for the shots of it walking through the streets. Those worked out well because an alligator is perfectly proportioned from birth, so even when it's a baby it photographs well on a miniature set.

The final scenes of the alligator gate-crashing the wedding party are wonderful.

We used the wheelbarrow-alligator-head a lot for that scene as it was snapping at the crowd. We also had this big alligator tail that we could hit people with and send them flying. Shooting that scene was a lot of fun. It was the culmination of the alligator's odyssey because it had been created by the industrialist who owned the petrochemical plant. The structure of the film was that when the creature broke out from underground and into the inner city, it worked its way up the socio-economic ladder! Finally, it reaches the wedding party, catches up with the industrialist himself as he hides in his limo and crushes the guy responsible for creating him. So we were actually interested in addressing themes of vivisection and pollution, but in a humorous way!

MICHAEL DOYLE

stoked his rage and he can barely wait to kill again. After a few aborted attempts to find a suitable victim, he quickly locates a house in a remote wooded area that seems perfect for the old surprise visit. Therein resides a family with an alcoholic matriarch in poor health, her mentally challenged, wheelchair-bound son, and the young, attractive daughter forced to look after them.

The Psychopath immediately gets down to business, operating on pure impulse and allowing immediate gratification to dictate his every course of action. Sadism, murder and violence visibly excite him, reason is abandoned. His frenetic, clumsy movements are difficult to watch as his ill-planned campaign of spastic terror culminates with a cold-blooded murder that's as nasty as they get.

Kargl and cinematographer Zbigniew Rybczynski observe the events through an array of disjointed compositions that echo the fractured mental processes of this fiend. A series of hypnotic, icy cues by former Tangerine Dream member Klaus Schulze perfectly illustrates his emotional dissonance, offering another perspective on the morbid sadness that unfolds before the lens.

Stylistically inventive and massively influential on the work of notorious filmmaker Gaspar Noé, *Angst* is a perfect storm of cinematic derangement – 83 solid minutes of observing a lunatic's disordered mind come to the absolute boiling point.

STUART F. ANDREWS

ANGUISH

1987/SPAIN/86 MIN
STARRING ZELDA RUBINSTEIN, MICHAEL LERNER AND TALIA PAUL
DIRECTED BY BIGAS LUNA

Anguish may have won awards at international festivals, but whenever anyone ranks the best horror films of all time (or even of the '80s for that matter), this one never makes the list. Strange, because it is easily one of the most unorthodox and brilliant fright films of the latter part of this century.

It focuses on the relationship between John (Michael Lerner), an optometrist with poor vision, and Alice, his domineering mother (Zelda Rubinstein, of *Poltergeist* fame). For reasons that are vague, Alice hypnotizes her son and orders him to commit bizarre murders in which he relieves his victims of their eyeballs.

Pretty standard stuff but then by the second murder, about a third of the way into the film, the camera pans left, zooms out and – SPOILER ALERT! – reveals that we are actually watching the movie on screen in front of a theatre audience! The effect on the unsuspecting viewer is unequalled by any other film that uses the movie-within-a-movie conceit. From there, director Bigas Luna develops both films simultane-

THE ARCANE SORCERER

1996/ITALY/96 MIN
STARRING GARLO CECCHI, STEFANO DIONISI AND ARNALDO NINCHI
DIRECTED BY PUPI AVATI

Common is the cinematic period piece. Less common is the film that feels as if it was lensed years before it actually was, with cinematography, pacing and storytelling all seemingly from another era. Such is *The Arcane Sorcerer* (a k.a. *L'arcano incantatore*, in its original Italian). The measured mood piece is drenched in forlorn atmosphere, brimming with complex ideas about the nature of good and evil, and couched in visuals that show an amazing amount of attention to historical detail – from the melancholic shots of the desolate countryside to towering libraries full of mysterious old tomes, housed within dilapidated stonework holy buildings.

Perhaps its ageless visual style is due to the fact that its writer/director, Pupi Avati, got his start during the 1970s, before horror largely succumbed to the modern excesses of gore and music video-style edits. Regardless, the film – about a young monk (Stefano Dionisi) who impregnates a woman and is subsequently relocated to a remote tower to serve an excommunicated priest with ties to the occult – doesn't telegraph the mysterious forces at play within it, allowing each viewer to take away what they will from the story. As strange things begin to occur in and around the tower, audiences, just like the monk himself, may find their faith and fears tested, as it soon becomes clear that the whispered rumours of evil may be more than hearsay.

The Arcane Sorcerer

Guillermo del Toro curated a screening of the film in Toronto in 2011 as part of his Master Class series at Bell TIFF Lightbox, and was more than willing to talk to us about why *The Arcane Sorcerer* leaves such an indelible imprint on those who have seen it.

How did you discover the film?

A friend of mine told me about it in Spain. I had loved Pupi Avati's previous horror film, *The House of the Laughing Windows* [1976], so I was very curious about the way he described it; he said he thought it had a lot in common with *Cronos*' Alchemist and felt I would enjoy it because I love occult books, I collect them for real. So I looked for it. It was not released in the States, but finally I found a copy that was made from a really bad print, but what a beautiful movie! I bought it on DVD from Italy and finally contacted Pupi – and I've been screening it here and there when I can.

Why do you love this movie so much?

Well, the main thing for me is the fact that it can be very pastoral, really sort of bucolic – it starts absorbing the openness of the landscape and the really slow trickle of time. And then those two elements, which can be liberating normally in a movie, end up being really repressed, and it reminded me of – and has the intensity of – the best horror literature. It reminded me of all the classic writers I love: Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, H.P. Lovecraft, M.R. James and many, many others. And every single thing they talk about [in the film, including] demonology and alchemy, is all based on fact. It's stuff that I've researched and I've been obsessed with for many, many years. I was amazed by the accuracy of the period detail, the accuracy of the occult background. The way it was described back to me by [*Shaun of the Dead* director] Edgar Wright, who I invited to a screening, was, "This is the *Barry Lyndon* of horror movies." I agree with that – it is incredibly well observed and bright and delicate.

One of the most unique things about the film is that it feels like a much older movie...

You're very right, it almost feels like an impossible artifact, an impossible artifact that you found from another time, and the level of artistry in the movie is the level of artistry in a really big Italian production. You expect to find that in a Bertolucci film or a big historical production, but you never expect to find it in a genre movie, and that is part of the appeal.

Do you consider* The Arcane Sorcerer *a parable of sorts or is it trying to do something else with its narrative?

I think it's both, because it can certainly be a parable about occult knowledge. It can be like all great alchemy books, it can be ciphered and full of symbols, but at the same time, at the base of it all, is a really good goddamn horror story, and I think it's great when movies work at both levels. . . The moral ambiguity, and the ambiguity [in general], reminds me of really old writing. Also, like Casanova's memoirs, it reminds me of really old mannered writing, because it doesn't settle at one time or another in the world. The Priest is defrocked for the alleged sexual encounter, and that is our hero. Our hero is a fallen hero, and then he ends up basically living with the pigs, hidden from view and being corrupted by evil. And the way he is described – having read all the treatises I have read about witchcraft and black magic and things like that [so I have a perspective] – that the pestilence, the feces, all these things, come from a perception of reality that is hundreds of years old, when the occult and the supernatural were matter of fact, when people would talk about them without any theatrical inflection. It's really, really powerful.

Do you have a favourite sequence from the film?

I am mesmerized by that movie; I could say that my favourite part is the whole movie but probably the first encounter with the spiritual entity, as it's very subtle and very beautiful as it moves through the corridor and the books in the library, like a light that is really haunting and powerful.

Why has this film remained so obscure for so long?

I asked the same to Pupi Avati. It's going to be almost impossible to find [a copy] now because of distribution – the international art house circuit is dead. You have to have the hand-to-hand, word-of-mouth phenomenon to get this movie resurrected and I'm more than happy to do my part, by the way. I'm very happy to help out and talk about the movie everywhere I go and whenever I'm in reach of a movie projector.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

ously, slowly weaving the storylines together until the events in both movies are nearly identical. The movie-within-a-movie may be a novelty, but *Anguish* takes the idea to its logical conclusion, with style and suspense to burn.

AARON VON LUPTON

ASWANG

1994/USA/82 MIN
STARRING NORMAN MOSES, TINA ONA PAUKSTELIS AND JOHN KISHLINE
DIRECTED BY WRYE MARTIN AND BARRY POLTERMANN

OK, now that you're done snickering at the title, lemme explain what it means. An aswang, is a vampiric creature of Filipino folklore, the specifics vary from region to region, so the term can refer to a shapeshifter, evil witch, vampire or a variety of other monsters. Sometimes they eat the dead, feed on the living or try to snatch away the unborn, and they're usually female.

In *Aswang*, the movie, they're shapeshifting vampires with long, snake-like tongues that enter pregnant women to feast on their fetuses. The unborn child in peril here is inside Kat (Tina Ona Paukstelis), who's single and preggers, so she makes a deal to give the child up to a couple who can't get pregnant but require offspring to inherit the family apple orchard in Wisconsin. Yes, this is an American-made, Wisconsin-set horror movie based on Philippine folklore, and if you think that's strange, read on....

Once on the grounds of the estate, Kat encounters a wheelchair-bound grandma, a reclusive "touched" sister, a trespassing neighbour who's discovered strange cocoons on the property and, oh yeah, an aswang that sticks it's gigantic, slithering tongue inside her while she's sleeping.

There's certainly a corporeal Cronenberg ick to the body horror in *Aswang* that's designed to disgust, but that's only part of the madness. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is a huge influence too, so Kat also has to deal with a gaggle of maniacs, one of whom comes after her with a chainsaw. That's a lot of ingredients, but damn it they don't go together better than you would've ever thought possible, thanks to directors Wrye Martin and Barry Polterman treating their bonkers-yet-frightening concept with sincerity.

Dammit, the genre needs more films like *Aswang*, which have the guts to recombine familiar genre tropes and mine foreign folklore for fresh inspiration. The directors haven't produced anything horror since making this in '94, but after a movie like *Aswang*, they probably don't need to. **DAVE ALEXANDER**

AT MIDNIGHT I'LL TAKE YOUR SOUL

1964/BRAZIL/84 MIN
STARRING JOSE MOJICA MARINS, MAGDA MEI AND NIVALDO LIMA
DIRECTED BY JOSE MOJICA MARINS

Perhaps the work of no filmmaker better defines "cult" than that of highly-revered Brazilian writer/director Jose Mojica Marins, who not only produced that country's first horror film, but also forged a character that has become such a cultural icon that over time that it's nearly inseparable from his creator.

Marins' Ze do Caixão, or Coffin Joe as he is known in English, first appeared in this film as a Nietzschean nightmare whose goal in life is to sire a son with a perfect woman in order to continue his bloodline. He is the undertaker and scourge of a small village, an amoral atheist who scorns his fellow man and takes from them what he wishes, be it their women or their lives. When his wife Lenita (Valéria Vasquez) is unable to bear him a son he kills her with a tarantula and turns his attention to Terezinha (Magda Mei), who is engaged to his best friend, Antônio (Nivaldo Lima). When she refuses to forsake Antônio for him, Ze brutally murders Antônio, and after his funeral beats and rapes Terezinha in the hope of impregnating her. Terezinha denies him by committing suicide and a witch foretells of a reckoning for Ze.

This 1964 film was blasphemous and shocking for the time, and the anti-religious sentiment of it still resonates today. Marins conceived it as a trilogy and made the second chapter, *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse*, in 1967, but it wouldn't be until 2008 that he completed the saga with the superb *Embodiment of Evil*. THE BONE MET

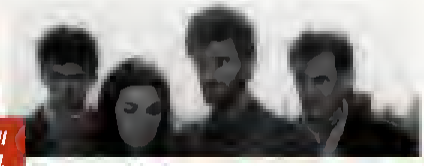
ATTACK THE BLOCK

2011/UK FRANCE/88 MIN
STARRING JOHN BOYEGA, JODIE WHITTAKER AND ALEX ESMAIL
DIRECTED BY JOE CORNISH

Getting the right balance when mixing genres is tricky, but *Attack the Block* makes it look like child's play. The Brit flick, which seamlessly melds science fiction, horror and humour follows a group of inner city teens caught up in an alien invasion who must defend their neighbourhood from creatures with pitch black black fur and glowing mouths.

Not only does the film present a group of heroes and a setting we've rarely, if ever, seen before, it's made with a distinct affection for '80s monster movies. In particular, the unique and utterly terrifying toothy gorilla-dog aliens are achieved with suits and puppets to fantastic effect.

Lying beneath this seemingly simple alien invasion movie, however, is a much bigger statement. Writer-director Joe Cornish aptly captures the atmosphere of a country currently going through changes and highlights



At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul. Attack the Block

the animosity and stark disconnect between age, class and race so subtly, the film channels the spirit of George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*. If you love a good monster tale with whip-sharp dialogue to boot, and a side of social commentary, *Attack the Block* is tops.

CHARLOTTE STEAD

BABY BLOOD

1990/FRANCE/82 MIN
STARRING EMMANUELLE ESCOURROU, JEAN-FRANCOIS GALLOTTE AND CHRISTIAN SINNIGER
DIRECTED BY ALAIN ROBAK

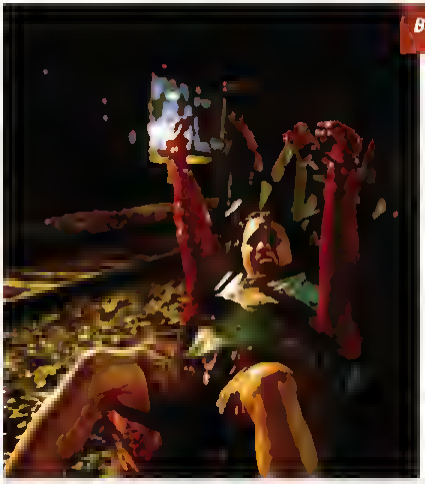
You don't expect to obtain great insight into the mother-child bond by watching French splatter flicks, but *Baby Blood* (a.k.a. *The Evil Inside*) delivers its ample servings of grue beside a commentary on the love-hate relationship pregnant women have with their unborn children.

Emmanuelle Escourrou stars as Yanka, a beautiful circus performer under the thumb of Lohman (Christian Sinniger), its brutal owner. She craves escape and gets her opportunity with the appearance of a new leopard that disturbs the circus' other cats. They sense something's wrong and their instincts are confirmed when the beast's exploded remains are found. What escapes turns out to be a tentacle that crawls into Yanka's womb.

Pregnant and terrified, she flees, but Lohman tracks her to a decrepit Parisian apartment. Bad move. His murder at Yanka's hands is just the first, as her unborn "child" demands blood. Oh yes, the entity inhabiting Yanka's womb speaks to its "mother," alternately threatening and cajoling her with its needs. She's initially horrified by its demand that she kill for it. But, as the months pass, she grows more confident and begins to like the ritual of seducing stupid men – many of whom have abused her in the past – and bleeding them dry.

Indeed, Alain Robak's film can be read as a feminist warning: guys, treat women like shit and die. None of the male characters here are sympathetic, all of them are pathetic, needy, abusive, callous or misogynist assholes. The only tenderness or understanding Yanka experiences is at the clawed hands of her demonic offspring. That said, this is no *My Dinner With Yanka*. *Baby Blood* is a gruesome exercise in comedy and horror filled to the brim with flying innards, decapitations and all manner of excessive exsanguination.

Be warned, though. The American dubbing for DVD is horrible, so stick to the original French language track, especially because the Americanized voice of the "baby" is nowhere near as creepy as the high-pitched synthetic



Baby Blood

wail heard in the French version. Plus, the "restored" scenes (the film was heavily cut for American theatrical release) have no dubbing, so you'll need subtitles anyway. SEAN PLUMMER

THE BAD SEED

1956/USA/129 MIN
STARRING NANCY KELLY, WILLIAM HOPPER AND CATHERINE MCCORMACK
DIRECTED BY MERVYN LEROY

The Bad Seed might be dated, but it packs a surprisingly unsettling punch in its unique cat-and-mouse game between a sociopathic little girl and a mother who can scarcely believe her own suspicions that her daughter is a cold-blooded killer.

Christine Penmark (Nancy Kelly) has it all: a beautiful home, a loving husband and a precocious young daughter named Rhoda (Patty McCormack). What most people don't know is that under Rhoda's sugar-sweet veneer simmers a cunning schemer given to irrational rage when she doesn't get her way. When a classmate dies in a mysterious accident at school, Christine starts noticing worrisome behaviour in her daughter, which grows in direct proportion to the body count. Fortunately for Christine, her own father (Paul Fix) and close friend Monica (Evelyn Varden) are very well-versed in psychoanalytic theory and, through them, she discovers that mysteries of her own past may be at play in Rhoda, and that it's up to her to end the cycle of evil.

The film stars several players from the original Broadway production, which could be why *The Bad Seed*

comes off stagey at times, but it doesn't detract from the brilliantly executed twists and turns that untold seamlessly through the story. Apart from the terribly disquieting climax that will have you squirming, it's the psychological undertones of the film that really get under your skin. Is evil innate? Can it be inherited? *The Bad Seed* tackles these topics without flinching and manages to put Rhoda alongside Damian, Reagan and Malachi as one of the horror genre's most memorable evil children.

ANAAEA SUAISSAT!

A BAY OF BLOOD

1971/ITALY/84 MIN
STARRING CLAUDINE AUGER, LUIGI PISTILLI AND CLAUDIO VOLONTE
DIRECTED BY MARIO BAVA

Widely recognized by the horror faithful as the precursor to *Friday the 13th* and the resultant tidal wave stalk 'n' slash cinema that followed, what separates *A Bay of Blood* (a.k.a. *Twitch of the Death Nerve*) from its bastard offspring is that it's actually a very good film.

You sure can't go wrong with Italian horror maestro Mario Bava, and *A Bay of Blood* finds him in fine form. It is interesting how 30 years of slasher films have diluted what was, at the time, an original premise: a group of people ranging from an elderly woman and her husband to some partying (and typically horny) teens are strangled, decapitated and impaled along a pristine piece of waterfront property. As more bodies pile up, everyone is both a target and a suspect, with the revelations adding fun to the film. At its most basic, *A Bay of Blood* is a wickedly subversive movie full of twists and turns that are always unpredictable.

And what puts *A Bay of Blood* severed heads above its offspring is its stylish direction and clever story. Bava shows a deft hand in handling set piece after bloody set piece, and the film is laced with morbid humour that both alleviates and, at times, adds to the already unbearable tension. BRAA AARAAAM

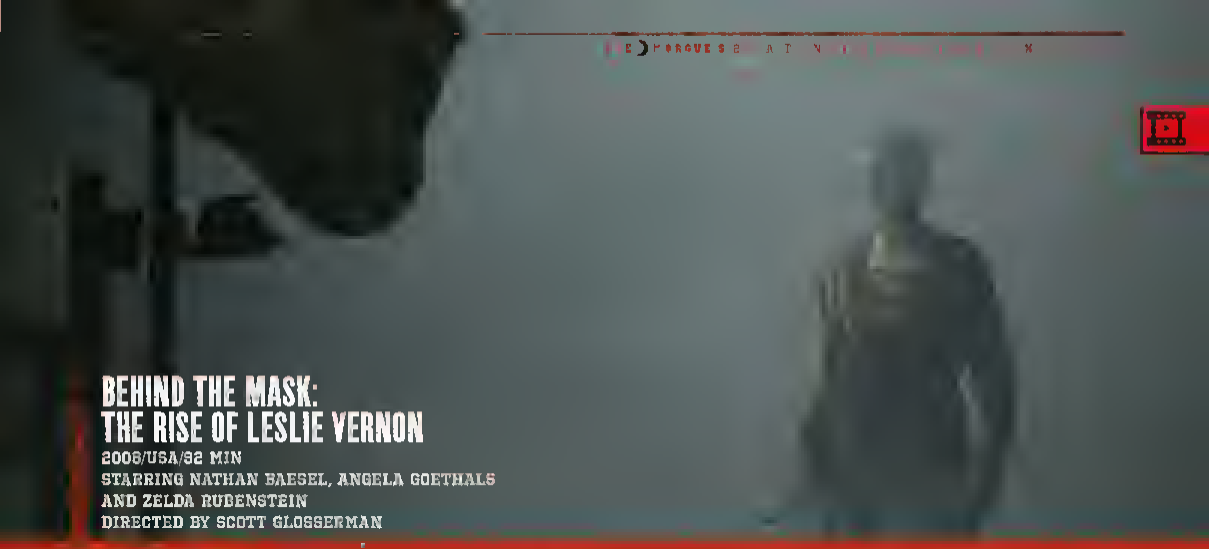
THE BEAST WITHIN

1982/USA/96 MIN
STARRING RONNY COX, BIBI BESCH AND PAUL CLEMENS
DIRECTED BY PHILIPPE MORA

From *I Was A Teenage Werewolf* right on up through *Carrie* and *Ginger Snaps*, adolescence – a time of transformation, sexual awakening, explosive emotion, self-doubt and self-discovery – is a theme that has served horror cinema magnificently, and we're far from done with it yet. Having said that, with its loopy plotting and leaps of logic, *The Beast Within* is neither at the top nor bottom of the long list of films to mine this territory, but it's a damn fine monster flick shored up by a damn fine cast, and hence highly recommended.

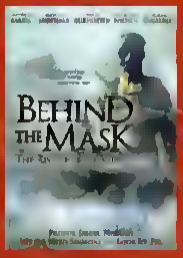
Seventeen years after being raped in rural Mississippi on her wedding night by a half-human creature, a woman (Bibi Besch) and her husband (Ronny Cox) become increasingly worried about a mysterious illness plaguing their teenage son Michael (Paul Clemens). As

A Bay of Blood



BEHIND THE MASK: THE RISE OF LESLIE VERNON

2006/USA/92 MIN
STARRING NATHAN BAESEL, ANGELA GOETHALS AND ZELDA RUBENSTEIN
DIRECTED BY SCOTT GLOSSERMAN



In the genre, few horses are deader or get flogged harder than the slasher movie. Like zombie flicks, they're cheap to make, always find an audience, and first-time directors can easily follow their formula. But once in a while along comes a guy like Scott Glosserman, who finds an entirely new way to capture a killer on film.

The Bethesda, Maryland native studied film in university (where he wrote a thesis on *The Shining* in a Conventions of the Horror Film class), before going to work at a talent agency where a friend helped him discover the ideal concept for a first feature. It was a script called *Behind the Mask* by a fledgling screenwriter named David J. Stieve.

"David had fleshed out a great premise – kind of a layman's seemingly stream-of-conscious story – where a psycho-slasher had given a documentary crew access to his private life," Glosserman says. "It was laugh-out-loud funny and extremely imaginative. However, it did not contain a detailed deconstruction of the real conventions, archetypes, symbols, themes and images of the horror – specifically the slasher – genre."

So Glosserman and Stieve spent most of 2002 working the script through about 25 drafts to find the right tone of satire and horror, entertainment and academia. They ended up with *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon*, an intriguing mix of *Man Bites Dog* and *Scream* that switches back and forth from documentary reality (captured on DV) to a hyper-self-aware narrative (shot on Super 16mm) that meticulously examines the clichés of the slasher film, with blackly comic bravado.

It stars Nathan Baesel as Leslie Vernon, who's akin to a smarter, more amicable version of the Stifler character from the *American Pie* movies. Leslie reads philosophy, has pet turtles, drives a hybrid, likes hugs, and wants more than anything to be the next big serial killer in a world where Freddy, Jason and Michael Meyers are said to actually exist.

"I wanted to demonstrate that horror, even slasher horror, is a sophisticated genre worthy of cinephilic study," explains Glosserman. "I chose a cerebral, satirical deconstruction versus a *Scary Movie*-type parody for that reason."

Sharing his secrets with journalism student Taylor Gentry (Angela Goethals) and her two-man documentary film crew, Leslie prepares for his inaugural night of killing. He picks a pretty virgin with promiscuous, drug-using friends, scouts an isolated farmhouse location with the appropriate symbolism, sets up his preliminary red herring scare, exercises so he can chase down his prey, and visits his retired mentor for advice – all the while excitedly explaining his philosophies about "the trade." Leslie even finds his "Captain Ahab," the Dr. Loomis archetype of the good man willing to fight the killer at any cost. The filmmakers scored Robert Englund for the part.

"I figured if I offered him a role that went against type, he might actually consider it," says Glosserman, who hired the icon for a week out of the 24-day production schedule. "Further, I thought it'd be fun for horror fans to see him take on the Donald Pleasence role for a change. . . Okay, and from a practical level, I figured getting Robert was a good play to hedge my financiers' investment."

Glosserman raised the capital for the film privately after getting turned down by industry types. He shot it outside of Hollywood, in the Portland, Oregon area, which provided the mix of urban and rural locations he needed. And while he won't leak the film's budget, he admits it's "way less than a million," which was doable in part because much of the movie was shot on hand-held video. What results is an inventive mix of black humour and cerebral horror that deconstructs the slasher genre from the inside out. DAVE ALEXANDER

Behind the Mask

Michael's symptoms grow worse and doctors' diagnoses remain unsatisfactory, the couple returns to the scene of the attack – and the town nearby – to do their own sleuthing, turning up increasingly unsettling local secrets. Meanwhile, Michael's violent outbursts grow worse, culminating in one of the most outrageous (and prolonged) human-to-monster transformation scenes ever committed to celluloid, which is probably why *TBW* is frequently misidentified as a werewolf film. So what is it, then? A monster movie? Latter-day Southern Gothic? An amateur detective film? A twisted coming-of-age fable? I'd have to say yes to all. **JOHN W. BOWEN**

BLACK DEATH

2010/GERMANY, UK/102 MIN
STARRING SEAN BEAN, EDDIE REDMAYNE AND CARICE VAN HOUTEN
DIRECTED BY CHRISTOPHER SMITH

It's a shame that horror films are so frequently seen as a cheap and easy way to break into Hollywood, because this has resulted in some very fertile pastures going largely unexplored, including historical horror. Perhaps this is why Christopher Smith's *Black Death* made such an impression when it dropped on DVD in early 2011; it wasn't a retread of characters and tropes we've seen a million times before, but rather a gritty, realistic film that meshes authentic period drama with the bodily horrors of the Black Plague and a healthy dose of religious superstition and supernatural intrigue.

Young monk Osmund (Eddie Redmayne) has a secret: his illicit girlfriend has just fled the city in hopes of escaping the ravages of the plague, and he desperately wants to join her. When a group of witch hunters arrive looking for a guide to lead them to a farflung village, Osmund considers it a sign from God. He only learns later that the community in question is allegedly being led by a necromancer, who the entourage has been tasked with capturing and returning for execution. It's a journey plagued with death, disaster and deadly infectious disease, and one that ultimately brings Osmund into a brutal, murderous head-on confrontation with his own faith. And even then, *Black Death* doesn't let up, ending on a note that's several shades darker than the one it began on.

Bold in both its unconventional setting and exceptionally bleak ending, *Black Death* is a grim joy to behold. The sprawling British countryside and ill-kept ramshackle villages bolster the period authenticity, along with the well-crafted Middle Ages garb and grisly plague boil effects. The film is further elevated by its outstanding cast, particularly Sean Bean as the seasoned witch hunter, Carice van Houten as the mysterious town elder, and Redmayne as the conflicted monk. All these elements combine to make *Black Death* an exceptional example of what period horror could be, if only the studios dared take a chance on it more often. **MONICA S. KUEBLER**

Black Death

THE BLACK PIT OF DR. M

1959/MEXICO/82 MIN
STARRING GASTON SANTOS, RAFAEL BERTRAND AND MAPITA CORTES
DIRECTED BY FERNANDO MENDEZ

An expressionistic horror masterpiece that stands as one of the finest Mexican horror films ever released, *The Black Pit of Dr. M* sees director Fernando Mendez crank up the pre-Mario Bava atmosphere to unprecedented levels of eeriness, and apply layers of grotesque imagery like a thick fog of doom.

In a decrepit asylum, prominent physicians Dr. Aldama (Antonio Raxel) and Dr. Masali (Rafael Bertrand) have made a pact: whoever dies first will return from the spirit realm to reveal if there's a way to return to life after death. After Aldama is six feet under, Masali contacts his former colleague through a séance and learns that there is indeed a way to cheat the reaper. Some months later, an orderly kills an insane gypsy woman who previously splashed disfiguring acid on his face. Falsely accused of the murder, Masali's increasingly maniacal obsession with death threatens to overwhelm him when he's sentenced to hang. The plot may be sporadically confusing, but the art direction is simply breathtaking – a cavernous dance club with girls in flowing dresses, wildly flailing arms sticking out of asylum cells, and a foreboding gallows shot entirely in silhouette. Eerily reminiscent of the work of F.W. Murnau, James Whale and Val Lewton, there's an overwhelming sense of fatalism to *The Black Pit of Dr. M* that hooks the viewer into the creepy theatrics, as misfortunes orchestrated from beyond the

grave turn Masali's confidence to desperation and madness, propelling the plot to its jaw-dropping ending.

PAUL CORUPE

THE BLACK ROOM

1935/USA/70 MIN
STARRING BORIS KARLOFF MARIAN MARSH AND ROBERT ALLEN
DIRECTED BY ROY WILLIAM NEILL

One of the best non-Universal horror films of the '30s, Roy William Neill's *The Black Room* is a tremendous Gothic tale drenched in heavy fatalism. Featuring one of Boris Karloff's greatest performances, in a rare dual role as his own twin brother, the horror icon really stretches his chops in his portrayal of dissimilar siblings struggling to escape the grip of a deadly prophecy.

The eldest by a few seconds, Gregor has assumed the title of Baron and rules his people with an iron fist. But the peasants, suspecting him of kidnapping and murdering young village girls, are on the verge of an uprising. That's when long-absent, crippled brother Anton returns, sparking speculation that this visit may trigger a family curse. It's believed that the younger brother is destined to murder the elder in a fit of rage in the castle's titular chamber, a creepy, claustrophobic place that can only be accessed by slipping through a secret passage behind the fireplace. Neill, who later made his name as the director behind most of Basil Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes films and the classic *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), fills the movie with rich, striking images, anticipating the mood and look of many of Roger Corman's Poe films three decades later. But no presence is more ominous than the room itself – with walls made out of dark reflective onyx and a deep pit that Gregor uses to dispose of bodies, the chamber emanates a sense of unavoidable dread that drives the story to its inevitable, yet still shocking, conclusion.

PAUL CORUPE

BLACK SHEEP

2006/NEW ZEALAND/87 MIN
STARRING OLIVER DRIVER NATHAN MEISTER AND TAMMY DAVIS
DIRECTED BY JOHNATHAN KING

Consider it the Peter Jackson movie that Peter Jackson never made. Set against the pastoral greenery of New Zealand's Wellington region, *Black Sheep* stars Nathan Meister as Henry Oldfield, a 30-something emotional cripple terrified of sheep ever since his father died while herding. He returns to the family farm, where his unscrupulous brother Angus (the Bruce Campbell-like Peter Feeney) is facilitating illicit genetic experiments with sheep. When bumbling activists accidentally unleash a biohazardous lamb, the entire herd becomes infected.

Henry, along with farmhand Tucker (Tammy Davis) and hostile new-agey activist Experience (Danielle Mason), gets stranded in the pasture as thousands of vicious sheep with a taste for human flesh attack the humans – including a group of international businessmen on hand for the unveiling of Angus' new breed of ovine. To make matters worse – or better for gore fans – anyone at-

Black Sheep

The Blob, Blood Creek

tacked by the creatures – *changes*. Soon, limbs are torn off, guts spilled and faces eaten by sheep creatures in various states of mutation. And yes, there are sheep-shagging jokes thrown in for good measure.

The real star of the show is the effects work of Weta Workshop, the New Zealand company famous for its contributions to Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* series and *King Kong*. With a noticeable chunk of the budget dedicated to prosthetics, puppets, animatronics, full monster costumes, rubber body parts, makeup and fake blood, *Black Sheep* hits all the buttons destined to make it a cult classic. Baaahhhd ass! **DAVE ALEXANDER**

THE BLOB

1988/USA/86 MIN
STARRING KEVIN DILLON, SHAWNEE SMITH AND DONOVAN LEITCH
DIRECTED BY CHUCK RUSSELL

When horror fans give examples of remakes that don't suck, the go-to movies are John Carpenter's *The Thing* and David Cronenberg's *The Fly*. Fair enough, but another great remake that tends to get forgotten is the late-'80s version of *The Blob*, an early career collaboration between Frank Darabont and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3* director Chuck Russell.

A remake of the 1958 Steve McQueen classic might be considered a ballsy move, considering it's high pedigree in the world of classic drive-in era horror, but Russell and Darabont smartly realized the potential of transferring those low budget thrills into the slimy world of '80s party

horror. *The Blob* 1988 boasts an awesome cast with Kevin Dillon (Drama from *Entourage*, of course) as a poodle-haired, motorcycle-riding badass anti-hero, and Shawnee Smith, long before becoming famous for the *Saw* films, straight from her role as a pregnant teen in the gory comedy *Summer School* (1987), as the strong heroine. (Also look for Darabont regular Jeffrey DeMunn as the sheriff.) The blob itself is a prime example of the era's ambitious practical effects (courtesy of Tony Gardner, *Zombieland*), and the purplish eating machine looks like it would taste good in a smoothie, even as it devours townsfolk.

And devour it does. As Dillon and Smith's characters try to save the locals, and the military goes on the offensive, we're treated to limbs torn off, victims digested alive and one poor guy pulled head-first into a drain.

Released in the midst of the summer movie season that perhaps wasn't in the mood for such goopy gore, *The Blob* bombed and currently exists only as a no-frills DVD release and free, legal stream on YouTube (in Canada). It's out there, just waiting to ooze its way into your heart. **AARON VON LUPTON**

BLOOD CREEK

2009/USA/90 MIN
STARRING DOMINIC PURCELL, HENRY CAVILL AND MICHAEL FASSBENDER
DIRECTED BY JOEL SCHUMACHER

You don't often expect to find treasure in trash heaps, so when Lionsgate essentially dumped *Blood Creek* onto DVD, one didn't expect much. Such was the fate of director Joel Schumacher's first full-blooded foray into horror after working with the pretty vamps of *The Lost Boys* and the pretty woman herself, Julia Roberts, in *Flatliners*. How full-blooded, you ask? We're talking Nazi vampire-zombies. Or vampire-zombie Nazis. Take your pick. Either way, I come to praise *Blood Creek*, not to bury it, this is one fast-paced flick with a strong cast, arresting images and a scary monster.

A German Expressionist-style prologue introduces us to Professor Richard Wirth (Michael Fassbender, *Inglourious Basterds*), a Third Reich officer studying the Nordic runes on the property of the Wolfners, German immigrant farmers newly settled in West Virginia. Wirth, on behalf of Hitler, wants the power of life over death, which the runes promise. Eighty years later, Evan Marshall (Henry Cavill, *Hellraiser: Hellworld*) is recruited by his older brother Victor (Dominic Purcell, *Primeval*) to kill the family that imprisoned him for the last two years: the Wolfners, who have not aged a day in decades. The remainder of the running time is an increasingly tense series of showdowns between the brothers and Wirth, whose grisly occult experiments have brought him to the brink of immortality and omniscience.

Schumacher employs the hand-held camera style he used in *Tigerland*, which makes the action very kinetic. He also uses CGI sparingly, creating unsettling images, such as an undead horse blown apart by gunfire. It's creative, creepy stuff, shot on a minimal budget.

But *Blood Creek*'s greatest "effect" is Fassbender's Wirth. Swaddled in bandages at the beginning, his horrifying visage is gradually revealed, as are his terrifying plans for humanity. Fassbender sells his character's evil with every whispered incantation. **SEAN PLUMMER**

BLOOOY BIRTHOAY

1981/USA/85 MIN
STARRING LORI LETHIN, MELINDA CORDELL AND JULIE BROWN
DIRECTED BY ED HUNT

A near-forgotten entry in the early '80s slasher boom, *Bloody Birthday* is a great example of the power of the killer kid subgenre. Despite being an awkward descendent of similarly themed films such as *The Bad Seed* or *Who Can Kill A Child?*, the movie's unsettling images of kids engaged in acts of violence are still disturbing.

Three babies (two boys and a girl) are born during a lunar eclipse caused by Saturn, the planet that allegedly regulates emotion. As a result, the three little buggers grow up to be murderous sociopaths who celebrate their tenth birthdays by offing a teenage couple making out in an open grave (hot!). Only local boy Timmy and his sister

Bloody Birthday

Joyce (Lori Lethin *Return to Horror High*) suspect the brats, which makes them next on the hit list.

Though it starts out as other slashers of the era do – people getting murdered in the dark by unseen killers – *Bloody Birthday* quickly becomes a drawn-out game of cat-and-mouse in which the kids try to kill Timmy and Joyce, while the duo attempts to convince the neighbourhood of the children's evil intentions. Curiously, there's very little structure to the story at all, the tykes randomly murder various people in elaborate but not particularly bloody sequences. Even the titular birthday bash is barely even a key plot point.

Despite the sloppy writing, however the movie packs plenty of fun exploitation moments which are made infinitely more icky by involving children. In one of the film's highlights, the little girl invites the two boys to peep on her older sister doing a striptease, before they off the buxom gal with an arrow through the eye! It's not a film you'll easily forget. **AARON VON LUPTON**

BODY PARTS

1991/USA/88 MIN
STARRING JEFF FAHEY, BRAD DOURIF, AND ZAKES MOKAE
DIRECTED BY ERIC RED

The concept of transplanting a killer's body parts into an ordinary person with murderous results has a rich tradition in horror, going back in some ways to James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), and more directly to *Mad Love* (1935). *Body Parts*, an early '90s thriller based on the novel *Choice Cuts* by the writers of *Les Diabolique* and *Vertigo* takes this concept to the next level, suggesting that evil does indeed reside in the flesh.

Jeff Fahey, best known today for his roles in *Planet Terror* (2007) and TV's *Lost*, plays a prison psychologist named Dr. Chrushank, who loses his arm in a car crash only to become one of three people to have their limbs replaced by an executed serial killer. Soon after the surgery, Chrushank is tormented by nightmares and his arm begins acting as though it has a life of its own. As the doc investigates, he meets another donor recipient, a twisted artist, played brilliantly by Brad Dourif, and another man who has received the murderer's legs and is now subject to violent mood swings. The story inevitably moves towards a violent climax in which all three meet.

Fahey's performance is an all-time best, demonstrating the physical turmoil of man learning to use his body again, and the psychological rage of the killer, whose presence takes over his evil appendage. It works as a cool combination of '80s comic book splatter with chilling shades of the darker, more psychological turmoil.

AARON VON LUPTON

BUG

2006/USA/102 MIN
STARRING MICHAEL SHANNON, ASHLEY JUDD AND HARRY CONNICK JR.
DIRECTED BY WILLIAM FRIEDKIN

Thirty-three years after scarring audiences with his immortal possession classic *The Exorcist*, American auteur William Friedkin returned to the horror genre with this similarly stand-out work of acute paranoia.

Agnes (Ashley Judd), a depressed and despondent bartender is desperately trying to escape her abusive ex (Harry Connick Jr.) with booze and drugs when she meets someone new, disturbed ex-soldier Peter (Michael Shannon). The two damaged souls strike up an unlikely romance, at least until Peter convinces her that the squalid hotel room they've shacked up in is infested with microscopic bugs created by the government, which are trying to burrow their way into the pair's bodies.

Taking place on a single set, Friedkin shows his flair for dramatic tension as the pair convert the rented room into an incubator of dark obsession, draped in tinfoil and UV bug zappers to take care of an swarm of invisible creepy-crawlies. While it's true that *Bug* hews closely to the script's roots as an off-Broadway stage play (by Tracy

Lotts, who scripted the movie, and also penned Friedkin's latest project, *Killer Joe*), few films get as intensely claustrophobic as this one, as Agnes and Peter start literally tearing themselves apart under Friedkin's keenly rendered watch, making for a thoroughly literate take on modern anxieties that updates some of the obsessions explored in Friedkin's previous, non-horror work.

PAUL CORUPE

THE BURROWERS

2008/USA/96 MIN
STARRING CLANCY BROWN, DAVID BUSSE AND WILLIAM MAPOTHER
DIRECTED BY JT PETTY

In *The Burrowers*, J.T. Petty sets out to destroy all romantic notions of the frontier with an equal balance of brutal, bloody western violence and brutal, bloody creature feature horror. He succeeds with spectacular results. Set in 1879 on the still wild plains of the Dakota territories, this cowboy creeper begins when a pioneer family is attacked one night by an unseen force. The next day, Irish immigrant Coffey (Karl Geary, who was also in Petty's *Mimic: Sentinel*) calls upon them – hoping to marry one of the daughters – and finds gore, bodies and evidence that some of the victims, including his love, have been abducted. Assuming that Indians are responsible, he forms a posse with the John Wayne-like John Clay (veteran character actor Clancy Brown), capable cowpoke Will Parcher (William Mapother, the American remake of *The Grudge*) and the teenage son of the woman Will is courting.

The group is aided – if you can call it that – by an army regiment led by Henry Victor (Doug Hutchinson, *The Green Mile*), a cruel tyrant who orders an Indian captive tortured for information. The prisoner tells the white men that "the burrowers" are to blame for the atrocities. Realizing that Henry is a madman barking up the wrong tree, Clay and company continue their search without the army's aid. They're soon joined by the regiment's cook, a former slave named Callaghan (Sean Patrick Thomas, *Halloween: Resurrection*), who's also had enough of Henry. Together they ride out in search of the missing homesteaders but find the unimaginable lurking in the soil itself.

Petty cements his reputation as a filmmaker adept at slowly ratcheting up tension as his group of men first discover strange holes in the grassland, then a paralyzed girl buried in the dirt, and eventually the burrowers themselves, as the things creep to the surface at night to hunt. These nasty critters, along with the search-for-a-kidnap-victim plot, have elicited descriptions as a cross-between *Tremors* and the iconic 1956 Wayne western *The Searchers*, but *The Burrowers* also offers strong social, political and racial commentary throughout that recalls not just the caustic cinema of George A. Romero, but the gritty, self-critical westerns of the 1970s. Petty has crafted an ambitious, bloody and relentlessly downbeat horror-western hybrid, in which men are evil, monsters are hungry and the frontier has never been more frightening.

DAVE ALEXANDER

The Burrowers

10 GORE FILMS YOU NEED TO SEE

BY THE GORE-MET

BAD TASTE

1987/NEW ZEALAND/81 MIN

Academy Award-winning director Peter Jackson is best known for the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, but his career as a filmmaker has humble origins. His first film, shot on weekends over four years with friends as cast and crew, is Monty Python-esque splatstick about a quartet of government agents thwarting an invasion by aliens who plan to turn Earth into a fast food restaurant. Behold a steady stream of inventive special effects gags include decapitations, vomit drinking and an exploding sheep.

A BAY OF BLOOD

1971 ITALY/84 MIN

A husband murders his elderly wife for control of her valuable waterfront property, but is promptly murdered himself, setting off a cleverly convoluted string of murders amongst a disparate group of stakeholders. Bava's blackly comic body-count classic was a major inspiration for the ensuing slasher genre, with its hatchet-in-the-face and in-coitus couple impalement blatantly copied in the *Friday the 13th* films.

DEMONS

1985/ITALY/80 MIN

A mysterious man in a silver mask hands out tickets to random passers-by for a screening of a horror movie, but when events in the theatre mirror those in the film the audience find themselves trapped and turning into bloodthirsty demons! Spectacular transformation scenes, gory deaths, and almost non-stop action make this one of the most purely entertaining horror films of the '80s!

I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE

2010/USA/108 MIN

This is one of the few successful examples of the remake trend of the last decade. The premise stays true to the notorious 1978 original – budding author Jennifer Hills is gang-raped and left for dead but comes back to exact revenge on her attackers – except that the violence is ratcheted up to torture porn levels, with some icky ocular trauma, an acid bath and shotgun sodomy.

INSIDE

2007/FRANCE/83 MIN

The nouveau wave of extreme French cinema gave us some incredibly gory films such as *Frontière(s)* (2007) and *Martyrs* (2008), but this ballet of brutality is arguably the quintessential splatter film of the new millennium. The plot is slasher film simple – a very pregnant woman alone at home is terrorized by a psychotic woman intent on cutting the unborn child from her womb. All kinds of household items are pressed into service as weapons in a ceaselessly creative cavalcade of carnage pushed to absurd levels before the heartbreaking climax.

THE NEW YORK RIPPER

1982/ITALY/91 MIN

If it quacks like a duck, then it must be a duck, unless it's a black-gloved killer in a Lucio Fulci flick! The titular annoyingly voiced killer

slashes young women with a straight razor and taunts the bedraggled detective on the case by phone, while rich people indulge in crude sex games. This is a cynical film about moral corruption in the Big Apple, punctuated by broken bottles rammed into vaginas and sliced off nipples. Fulci's last true hurrah!

NIGHTMARE

1981/USA,ITALY 87 MIN

A schizophrenic wracked by nightmares is released from psychiatric care as part of a research project and quickly embarks on a cross-country murder spree, eventually targeting a young family in Florida. Scenes shot in genuine 42nd St. porn parlours in New York and a quality gore quotient, including a climactic double axe murder, make this one of the sleaziest of the '80s slasher cycle.

PHENOMENA

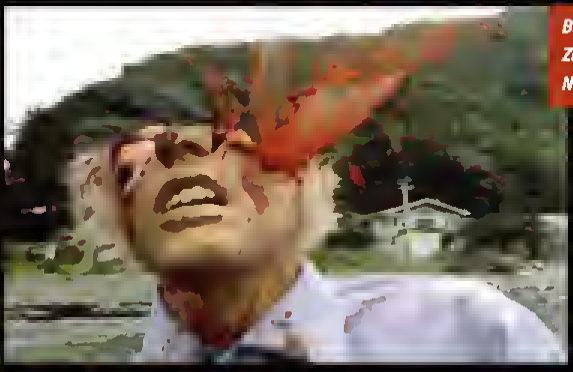
1986 ITALY 110 MIN

A troubled young girl who can telepathically communicate with insects is sent to a Swiss boarding school where a psychopath is carving up the student body. She teams up with a world-famous entomologist to use her gift to unmask the killer. Director Dario Argento essentially remade *Suspiria*, but added more gore, lots of gross bugs, a razor-wielding monkey and a pool of rotting corpses!

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE 2

1986/USA 93 MIN

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974) is so psychotic that audiences don't know whether to shriek or laugh. Director Tobe Hooper intended the latter, and made sure you did in his sequel. The family from the original is back in business, with new brother, Chop Top, but a recording of a telephone call to a radio station that ended with them sawing up obnoxious college students brings the unwanted attention of a maverick U.S. Marshal. Amidst the black comedy is some gruesome gore, particularly those scenes that involve a man skinned alive.



Bad Taste, Inside, Zombie Holocaust, Nightmare

ZOMBIE HOLOCAUST

1980/ITALY 84 MIN

After an orderly is caught in the act of devouring the heart of a dead patient in a New York City hospital and leaps out a window to his death, an investigation by the head of the Public Health department and his comely sidekicks leads to a remote tropical island where a mad doctor is turning members of a local cannibal tribe into zombies. This infinitely entertaining rip-off of Lucio Fulci's *Zombie* (1979) is rife with scalping, disembowelment and gut munching.

THE BURNING

1981/USA/91 MIN
STARRING BRIAN MATTHEWS, LEAH AYRES AND BRIAN BACKER
DIRECTED BY TONY MAYLAM

The Burning

During the slasher boom of the '80s – thanks to *Friday the 13th* – a lot of tees were killed in the woods during the hazy days of summer. Following in the steps of Mrs. Voorhees, psychos flocked to the wilderness in slaughterthons such as *Madman* (1982), *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) and *The Mutilator* (1985). But few of these films were as nasty, or earned such a cult following as 1981's *The Burning*.

Based on the urban legend of the Cropsey (renamed "Cropsy" in the movie) maniac, *The Burning* tells the story of a summer camp caretaker who is burned beyond recognition during a prank gone wrong. Years later, armed with a pair of hedge clippers, he returns to seek revenge on new campers.

Sticking to the then-popular stalk-'n'-slash template, the film is a textbook case of a movie made for commercial, not artistic, reasons. It essentially served as Bob and Harvey Weinstein's first stab at the movie business before they founded Miramax films, and ironically years before their Dimension Films production company resurrected the slasher genre with *Scream*. Harvey co-wrote the script and produced, and to direct they hired UK filmmaker Tony Maylam, who had never made a horror film and was touring around a pair of "music-driven" movies he'd directed. They got the attention of Harvey, who was a rock promoter at the time.

"He wanted to get into movies and so he licensed my two films and released them as *Sensasia* in the U.S.," says Maylam. "That went well and we then discussed making a movie together. *The Burning* was the result. I worked with them before they gained their heavy reputation for 'eating directors for breakfast.' They left me alone and concentrated more on marketing the film, which I believe has always been their strength"

The Burning is also known for its cast of future movie and television celebrities, including Jason Alexander (*Seinfeld*'s George Costanza), Fisher Stevens (*Short Circuit*) and Holly Hunter (*Blood Simple*, *Crash*), who Maylam recalls "brought a lot of spontaneous enthusiasm to the set."

The real star of the show, however, is the ambitious effects work by Tom Savini, who turned down *Friday the 13th Part 2* to work on the movie, and delivered some of his most over-the-top carnage, notably in the film's raft massacre scene. In mere seconds, a good chunk of the cast is sliced and diced by Cropsy's garden shears – fingers go flying, a massive head injury is incurred and a throat is torn apart. Outside of the look of the hideously disfigured killer – conceived by Savini, Maylam and the Weinsteins – many consider this shocking, gory attack the film's greatest accomplishment.

"Shooting on water is always a challenge," explains Maylam. "For the main raft action we rigged

our camera boat alongside the victims' canoes and went for it. Special FX, drums of blood with plungers, actors with expendable body parts: cool! I would have liked to have gone much further, but censorship at the time restricted what we could get away with. We were always aware of the need to get the film released, not only in the U S but internationally."

Indeed, censorship proved to be *The Burning*'s bane, especially when a British video label accidentally released an uncut version. It was added to the UK government's infamous video nasties list, meaning it could be pulled from shelves under the Obscene Publications Act. It only added to the film's dangerous reputation.

While Maylam would not tackle any more horror projects, he says Cropsy may yet rise from the lake again.

"I've recently been approached to make a horror movie on the Cropsey legend to be shot in the U.S. I'm tempted. It has a fresh spin on the genre."

In the meantime, fans of the disfigured slasher can dig into *The Burning* special edition, which features a pristine, uncensored version of the film, a commentary track with Maylam and genre journalist Alan Jones, plus an insightful behind-the-scenes featurette with Savini. Twenty-five-years after its release, Maylam admits there's only one thing he wishes he could change: "I'd have made it a shitload more scary." AARON VON LUPTON

CALVAIRE

2004/BELGIUM FRANCE LUXEMBOURG/88 MIN
STARRING LAURENT LUCAS, BRIGITTE LAHAIE AND PHILIPPE NAHON
DIRECTED BY FABRICE DU WELZ

Even in the Not Your Average Plot Department, *Calvaire* is a standout as a gender-bending European artsploitation riff on the 1970's American survivalist horror film. When a low-rent cabaret singer finds himself stranded in a remote, backwoods Belgium village populated entirely by men, he becomes subject to a mass delusion and is mistaken as the only woman they've ever known returned to save them from their asexual asphyxiation. To ensure that (s)he doesn't leave again, they kidnap, humiliate and hideously torture the poor bastard, although, perversely, one feels more sympathy for the lonely perpetrators than the victim who, by virtue of his complete lack of innate character, serves as an easy target for the projection of their maniacal longings.

The cast and crew of *Calvaire* (a.k.a. *The Ordeal*) reads like a veritable rogue's gallery of infamous perpetrators of dark, French cinema. Beautifully shot on gloriously grainy super 16mm by Benoit Debie (cinematographer for Gaspar Noe's *Irreversible*), produced by Vincent Tavier (*Man Bites Dog* screenwriter), with a cameo by legendary porn queen Brigitte Lahaie and starring *Haute Tension*'s Philippe Nahon, (the man whose eyes have the power to mercilessly suck you into a vortex of unrelenting pain), *Calvaire* proves that the French (with the help of the Belgians) earned their place at the forefront of the horror genre.

STUART F. ANDREWS

Calvaire

CAPTAIN KRONOS – VAMPIRE HUNTER

1974/UK/91 MIN
STARRING HORST JANSON, JOHN CATER AND JOHN CARSON
DIRECTED BY BRIAN CLEMENS

In the early 1970s, Hammer Films attempted to remedy diminishing box office returns for its gothic horror productions modernizing them. They brought Christopher Lee's tanged Count into modern, swinging London, with *Dracula, A.D. 1972*; had Peter Cushing's Van Helsing assist a band of kung-fu fighting siblings in battling a group of bloodsuckers in *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires*; and released one of the company's most unusual but rewarding efforts, 1974's *Captain Kronos – Vampire Hunter*.

In a small European village, girls are being found drained – not of blood – but of their youth. The town's physician, Dr. Marcus (John Carson; *Plague of the Zombies*), sends for the one person he knows who can help – an old friend and former military colleague named Captain Kronos (Horst Janson). A professional vampire slayer, the dashing, swashbuckling hero arrives with his hunchbacked assistant, the brilliant Professor Hieronymus Grost (John Cater; *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*) and a beautiful gypsy named Carla (Caroline Munro; *Maniac*), whom they had rescued from confinement in the stocks. In their attempt to track down the life-draining creature(s), the trio come in contact with hired bandits, hooded strangers and members of a local family of mysterious aristocrats.

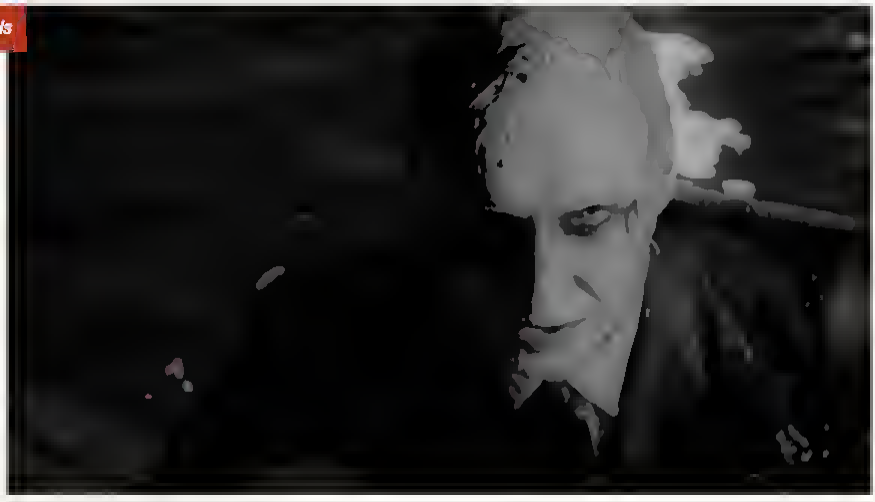
As he did with his previous opus for Hammer, the excellent *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971), writer/director Brian Clemens (TV's *The Avengers*) subverts traditional gothic horror motifs by not only permitting the vampires in this film to walk about in daylight, but also making the standard manner of dispatching them – via a wooden stake through the heart – ineffective. Action packed sequences, first-rate product design, marvelous dark humor and a rousing score by Laurie Johnson help make this a worthy, satisfying alternative to the Cushing and Lee classics. JAMES BURRELL

CARNIVAL OF SOULS

1962/USA/78 MIN
STARRING CANDACE HILLIGOSS, FRANCES FEIST AND SIDNEY BERGER
DIRECTED BY HERK HARVEY

For a $30,000 black-and-white feature that was the sole filmmaking effort of director Harold "Herk" Harvey, *Carnival of Souls* has had tremendous influence in the 50 years since its release. It certainly was for George Romero, who confessed to being inspired by it for *Night of the Living Dead*, and David Lynch, who saw the movie prior to making *Eraserhead*.

Shot in 1961 in Lawrence, Kansas, *Carnival of Souls* offers a startling unique viewing experience of "masterful naivete" (*Washington Post*), despite its less than stellar acting and modest budgetary constraints. Not surpris-


Carnival of Souls

ingly, given that title, the movie provides the type of story that would be at home in a typical episode of *The Twilight Zone*. It concerns Mary Henry (Candace Hillgoss), a young woman who is sent plummeting off a bridge with her friends during a drag-race with some neighbourhood boys. After emergency workers spend hours searching for the sunken car, Mary appears on a sandbar, mud-covered and confused but otherwise unharmed. She recalls little and seems to grieve less, unnerving the local pastor at the church where she plays the organ with her flagrant cynicism. In fact, Mary is unable to feel grief or loss, but she reveals she does have the capacity to experience fear one night as she drives through the desert towards Utah and spies a white-faced ghoul staring at her through the window. Its appearance causes her to drive off the road; its later re-appearances make it a key instigator to Mary's psychological, sexual and spiritual disintegration.

Much has been said about the cinematic style of *Carnival of Souls*, and the way it throws the viewer into maximum imbalance with simplest of effects. By isolating the inconsequential things of daily existence – the deep shadows of high noon at the carnival pavilion, a stranger's glance, a shot, from below, of a car being lowered on a hydraulic lift – the film makes fascinating rendering of mental and spiritual crisis. **EMMA ANDERSON**

THE CARS THAT ATE PARIS

1974/AUSTRALIA/91 MIN
STARRING TERRY CAMILLERI, JOHN MEILLON AND KEVIN MILES
DIRECTED BY PETER WEIR

Just the fact that this liffle oddity is the first feature from Peter Weir, the director behind *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Dead Poets Society* and *The Truman Show*, makes it automatically intriguing, as does that misleading title. The cars here don't literally eat anything, and "Paris" is a fictional small town in the Outback. Then again, the only thing standard about the movie are some of the vehicles.

Y'see, the people of Paris have taken to causing accidents involving motorists who pass by the town. They loot the wrecks, send the survivors to the local medical centre for lobotomies and medical experimentation, and the the youth modify the salvaged cars into garish, dangerous cruisers (which must've inspired the post-apocalyptic cars in 1981's *The Road Warrior*).

This warped world unfolds through the timid perspective of Arthur Waldo (the Dustin Hoffman-like Terry Camilleri), who's on a road trip with his brother when they fall prey to the town's trap. Only Arthur survives, and since he's a meek man too terrified to drive after a previous fatal car accident, he's allowed to work at the hospital and live with the mayor. Meanwhile, a feud between the young car modders and the rest of the town heats up and then boils over during Paris' annual Pioneer Ball. Mayhem ensues with plenty of bloody vehicular fatalities (yes, including death on the spikes of that VW Bug that looks like something out of a cenobite smash-up derby), with Arthur caught in the middle.

The social commentary is certainly there to add poignancy, but *The Cars That Ate Paris* can also be enjoyed for its crazed plot, bizarre characters, bombastic performances and visceral vehicular violence. So many exceptional, unsung genre films have come out of Australia, you can expect to see the country strongly represented on our list, but this may be the wildest of 'em all. Remember: you can't spell "weird" without "Weir."

DAVE ALEXANDER

CAT PEOPLE

1982/USA/118 MIN
STARING NASTASSJA KINSKI, JOHN HEARD AND MALCOLM MCDOWELL
DIRECTED BY PAUL SCHRADER

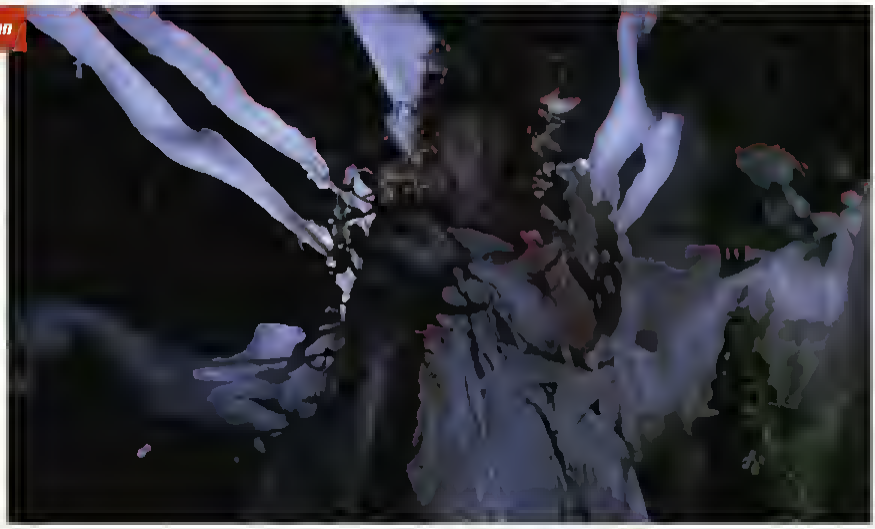
Some remakes are so derivative they barely deserve a copyright notice. Others such as this re-imagining of an enshrined classic, earn merit by trying to do something different.

Conspiring with screenwriter Alan Ormsby (*Deranged*), director Paul Schrader (still best-known for penning *Taxi Driver*) relocates the story from New York to New Orleans, where siblings, Irena (Nastassja Kinski) and Paul (Malcolm McDowell) are the last of an ancient race of shapeshifters who transform into leopards when sexually aroused. Paul surrenders to his predatory instincts and urges Irena to engage in incest to preserve their species. The only thing coming between Paul and his biological imperative is the zookeeper, Oliver (John Heard).

Comparing both versions of *Cat People* (as critics often do) is redundant as the substantial shifts in taste and subtlety over the 40 years that separate them are all too apparent. What was merely suggested in 1942 is made grotesquely explicit in 1982 as Schrader disregards the restraint of the Jaques Tourneur/Val Lewton film in favour of nudity, bondage and Tom Burman's rubbery effects (the director did urge Universal to re-title the film but this suggestion was nixed).

Schrader may have abandoned the implied dread of the original, but the results offer up their own rewards, including wonderful jolts such as Paul's vicious attack on

Cemetery Man



a prostitute (Lynn Lowry), and a human arm lurching out of a dead leopard during an autopsy. Don't expect the same experience as the original and you'll find much to like about this off-dismissed '80s foray into feline horror.

MICHAEL DOYLE

CEMETERY MAN

1994/ITALY/105 MIN
STARRING RUPERT EVERETT, ANNA FALCHI AND FRANCOIS HADJI LAZARO
DIRECTED BY MICHELE SOAVI

If ever you're lamenting your job situation, just remember it could always be worse. No matter what, Francesco, protagonist of the wonderfully weird existentialist zombie comedy *Cemetery Man*, with his gig at a cemetery filled with zombies has you beat by a mile.

In the sleepy Italian village of Buffalora, Francesco Dellamorte and his child-brained sidekick Gnaghi spend their days tending the graveyard grounds, sprucing up the joint so that the grieving can send their loved ones off in style. By night, the duo fights said loved ones, who rise from their almost-final slumber to cause general havoc and continually threaten to escape the cemetery gates. After one weepy service, Francesco befriends (alright, shtups) a widow, and her husband reanimates to give her a goodbye chomp. Hubby is quickly dispatched and widow falls dead, leaving Francesco lovelorn and blueballed something fierce. When she comes back to life, Francesco honourably takes her out. The problem is that she doesn't actually die, but simply falls unconscious and Dellamorte realizes he is the one who killed her. When she revives a second time, Francesco's guilt and affection prevents him from offing her... again. As Francesco tries to make things work between himself and his zombie lover, Gnaghi falls for the town mayor's underage daughter. When she is decapitated in an accident, the oafish caretaker digs up her noggin and picks up the romance where it left off. As all this is happening, Dellamorte tries in vain to convince local authorities of the spooky happenings in the cemetery, while deflecting job offers from the Grim Reaper himself.

Dellamorte Dellamore is a genre-jumping fever dream of head-scratching proportions that, thankfully, never fully commits to any one style. Is it a zombie movie? Yup. Social satire? Check. Necrophilia-tinted romantic comedy? You bet. Yet with all that said, actor-cum-director Michele Soavi keeps things coherent enough to make it work, placing Dellamorte Dellamore at the top of the list of weirdest and most memorable Italian horror movies ever made.

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TAL ZIMERMAN

The Changeling

THE CHANGELING

1980/CANADA/107 MIN
STARRING GEORGE C SCOTT TRISH VAN DEVERE AND MELVYN DOUGLAS
DIRECTED BY PETER MEDAK

Peter Medak once described *The Changeling* as "a Hitchcockian haunted house movie" and the manner in which this elegant nail-biter attempts to sustain a palpable air of mystery, political intrigue and heart-stopping scares serves this out.

Purportedly based on a "true story," Scott stars as John Russell, a composer recovering from the deaths of his family in a snowbound road accident. Accepting a teaching job in Seattle, he leases an imposing mansion formerly owned by a distinguished politician. Shortly after moving in, Russell is disturbed by a violent drumming sound that echoes throughout the house with no apparent source, and witnesses the apparition of a dead child in a bathtub. Breaking into a sealed room on the attic floor, he discovers a child's wheelchair and unearths a decades-old atrocity.

The Changeling accommodates the kindred elements of the classic ghost story; an isolated protagonist enters The Bad House, experiences various supernatural phenomena, discovers the troubling source of the haunting, and (occasionally) appeases the shade before a final showdown in the cursed dwelling. Medak adopts all of these familiar aspects and conjures up a gripping atmosphere of psychological unease. Equal praise must also be given out to both cinematographer John Coquillon – whose prowling camera suggests a lively spectral presence that predates *The Shining* – and Scott, who delivers a restrained performance. All three bring their A-game to the terrifying "séance sequence" in which Russell enlists the help of a medium to reach out to the wilful spirit.

Unlike some ghost stories, the crime at its dark heart of *The Changeling* is a truly despicable one, and permeates the film with a despairing sense that in spite of the best efforts of good people, such terrible wrongs may forever remain unrighted. MICHAEL DOYLE

A CHINESE GHOST STORY

1987/HONG KONG/98 MIN
STARRING LESLIE CHEUNG JOEY WANG AND MA WU
DIRECTED BY SIU TUNG CHING

Human-ghost romances – always a pain in the ass, as proven by *A Chinese Ghost Story*. The film follows Ning Tsai-Shen (Leslie Cheung) as a hapless tax collector roaming rural hinterlands who accidentally ruins his records by dropping them in a puddle during a torrential downpour. Penniless, with no means to collect money from the businessmen in a small village, and banished by the local constabulary, he's forced to seek shelter for the night in an abandoned temple. There he meets and quickly falls in love with the mysterious and beautiful Nieh Hsiao Tsing (Joey Wang), but is disconcerted the next day to learn from Taoist warrior-priest Yen (Ma Wu) that she's a ghost. It turns out that Nieh was enslaved by a 1000-year-old tree demon with a serpentine tongue that sucks the life essence out of men and is betrothed to a high demon of Hell and can only be reborn if her ashes are returned to her family. Ning valiantly fails at that and then journeys with Yen to Hell to battle for Nieh's soul.

Films that combined Chinese folklore, martial arts, horror, and comedy were not new to Hong Kong cinema

when this film was produced – *Spooky Encounters* (1980) and *Mr Vampire* (1985) famously preceded it – but this wonderfully stylish and well-acted example enjoyed unprecedented international success, spawning two sequels, an animated feature, a television series, and a 2011 remake – yet, hasn't really reached horror fans' radar. The plot deftly balances the laughs and scares with innocent romance and high-flying swordplay, seasoned with practical effects sequences that include both animatronic and stop-motion monsters. It's time to rediscover *A Chinese Ghost Story*. THE GORE-MET

COMMUNION

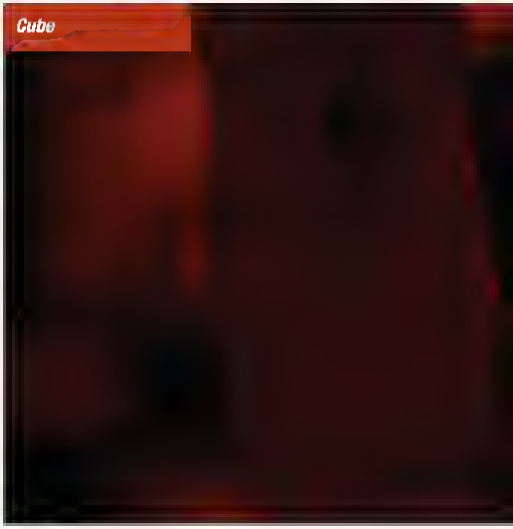
1989/USA.UK/107 MIN
STARRING CHRISTOPHER WALKEN
LINDSAY CROUSE AND BASIL HOFFMAN
DIRECTED BY PHILIPPE MORA

Some films just permeate dread, right from their opening scene, and *Communion* is a prime example. It opens with a helicopter shot which could be a point-of-view, as it descends ominously on Manhattan. Then we cut to a couple (played by Christopher Walken and Lindsay Crouse) sleeping soundly in their bed. The man bolts upright and looks directly into the camera. "Someone's here," he tells us – and he's right.

The movie is based on Whitley Strieber's bestselling book, which details an account of his supposed abduction by aliens. Whether you take it as fact or fiction, *Communion* is a terrifying story. Period. Walken plays Strieber, a successful writer living in New York City with his wife and son. A trip upstate to their remote cabin leads to a night of strange happenings that no one can fully recall much less explain the following morning, and over the course of the ensuing weeks, he starts having flashbacks of late night meetings with creatures not of this world.

Director Philippe Mora does a masterful job making these scenes intensely frightening, even though the spindly aliens are rubbery, he films them in a way that only adds to the surreal, dream-like quality of the film.

Regardless, *Communion* wouldn't work nearly as well as it does without Walken, who gives one of his most unhinged performances. Mora clearly gave him a long leash and he runs with it, at times threatening to outcreep the aliens (the real-life Strieber even asked Walken to tone down his performance for fears that he would come across as crazy). It's a strange performance in a strange movie, but if you take the subject matter seriously – and *Communion* does – it makes strange sense. MATTHEW WHITE



THE CRAWLING EYE

1958/UK/94 MIN
STARRING FORREST TUCKER, LAURENCE PAYNE
AND JENNIFER JAYNE
DIRECTED BY QUENTIN LAWRENCE

The Misfits wrote a song about it. Stephen King references it in his novel *It*. And John Carpenter credits it as a key inspiration for *The Fog*. But all you really need to know about *The Crawling Eye* is that it has giant, tentacled orbs that decapitate people – the rest is just details.

This monster movie-with-the-greatest-name-ever was penned by Jimmy Sangster, who wrote scads of early Hammer monster films, and despite an innate goofiness that earned it a spot on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, this is a classic sci-fi creature feature bolstered by plenty of original story ideas.

It mainly takes place in a mountain pass, where a radioactive cloud has appeared, which conceals something that's been tearing the heads off of climbers. A psychic travelling by train insists that she and her sister stop in the nearby Swiss village of Trollenberg after something beckons her there. (The original UK title of the film is *The Trollenberg Terror*, which proves how much better American distributors are at naming movies ...) It seems she can detect the presence of the alien life forms behind the attacks, and they don't like that one bit, so the crawling eyes go on the offensive, even using reanimated corpses to try to get her. Naturally, some square-jawed heroes

step in and eventually there's a big showdown on the side of the mountain.

With great pacing, a setting fraught with danger, a completely original (radioactive) monster, and some Saul Bass-like credits, this is everything you want in a '50s monster movie and more. Even the wonky miniatures just add to the charm. It's definitely worthy of being immortalized by the Misfits. **DAVE ALEXANDER**

CUBE

1997/CANADA/90 MIN
STARRING NICOLE DEBOER, DAVID HEWLETT AND MAURICE DEAN WINT
DIRECTED BY VINCENZO NATALI

The low-budget indie sci-fi thriller that took the 1997 Toronto International Film Festival by storm was the first feature-length offering from Vincenzo Natali, who is quoted as saying that he was just a lucky guy who came up with a truly original idea for a movie. The humble sentiment doesn't do him justice, because there's a lot more to *Cube* than the remarkably smart and simple concept.

The premise alone is intriguing: six people wake up in glowing, cube-shaped rooms with doors set on every side. Through each door is another room, identical in size and shape to the last. Some of them are set with lethal traps, though (a spray of acid, a sudden blow-torching, a deadly net of lightning-fast razor-wire), forcing the perfect strangers, who have no idea why they're there, to pool their skills and work together to unlock the mystery of the cube and escape. Personalities emerge as claustrophobic panic sets in and each prisoner reveals a unique talent to offer, though some prove just as hazardous as the traps. As confusion becomes paranoid terror, they learn that starvation is the least of their worries.

As with Natali's more recent feature *Splice*, the gore is marvelously executed but never threatens to overwhelm the plot, which makes masterful use of tautly-sustained tension. *Cube* makes no effort to reach beyond its means, and builds upon the cleverness of a crafty plot with well-drawn characters in a sterile and stifling atmosphere. A Canadian classic, it proves that budget is no constraint on creativity. **ANDREA SUBISSATI**

CURE

1997/JAPAN/111 MIN
STARRING KOJI YAKUSHO, MASATO HAGIWARA AND TSUYOSHI UJIKI
DIRECTED BY KIYOSHI KUROSAWA

Alongside Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* and Takashi Miike's *Audition*, Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Cure* was part of the first J-horror onslaught to gouge jaded North American eyeballs. Each of those films took then-prevailing notions of horror – mostly informed by *Scream* and its bastard progeny – and stood them on their heads.

That said, *Cure* is at least superficially, informed by American serial killer films such as *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Se7en*. The visual and thematic tropes are all there: a series of strangely marked corpses, the villain's lair as metaphor for his twisted mind, the restless cop with a strange affinity for his opponent, the cop's co-worker warning him "not to get too deep" and the personal life compromised by the danger of the job. But five minutes into this nightmarish headfuck and it becomes apparent that we're not in Hollywood anymore, Toto.

Even the premise is off-kilter. Koji Yakusho plays Takabe, a repressed Tokyo detective investigating a series of bizarre murders where the victims have had an "X" carved into them. The killings are being perpetrated seemingly at random by ordinary citizens who admit their guilt but don't know why they did it. The only connection between them is an amnesiac drifter (Masato Hagiwara) whose constant query – "Who are you?" – is filled with portent. It's a serial killer movie with no serial killer.

Kurosawa (no relation to Akira) isn't reluctant to spill blood (or peel away faces), but the real scares in *Cure* come from its impenetrable atmosphere of dread (aided and abetted by Gary Ashiya's atonal score and *Ju-On: The Grudge* cinematographer Tokusho Kikumura's affin-

ity for shadow). The director's idea, that our true selves are far more tainted and unknowable than we can imagine, is more frightening than any Hannibal Lecter or John Doe. -Sean Plummer

CURSE OF THE DEMON

1957/UK/95 MIN
STARRING DANA ANDREWS PEGGY CUMMINS AND NIALL MACGINNIS
DIRECTED BY JACQUES TOURNEUR

Some films expose the old Hollywood adage "show, don't tell" as a lie. In the case of *Curse of the Demon*, director Jaques Tourneur proved that "show a little, not a lot" is a wiser maxim.

The film tells the story of Dr. John Holden (Dana Andrews), an American psychologist invited to speak at a British conference on the supernatural. Holden places his faith in science and dismisses the power of the occult, but his skepticism nearly costs him his life. As he arrives in London, he is told that his colleague, Professor Harrington (Maurice Denham), has died a gruesome and unnatural death. Prior to his demise, Harrington had been investigating Satanic cult leader Julian Karswell (Niall MacGinnis), a character modeled on infamous occultist Alester Crowley. Distraught by the news, Holden is determined to find his colleague's killer and unmask Karswell as a fraud. When Holden threatens to expose the magician, Karswell passes him a piece of paper with runic symbols which prophecy the psychologist's death in three days time.

That *Curse of the Demons*'s success as an atmospheric chiller with an overwhelming sense of doom, is in no small part due to Tourneur. The Frenchman had ably demonstrated his ability to chill audiences (and earn boffo box office) by helming both *Cat People* (1942) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), genre classics to this day. He also directed one of the first and best film noirs, 1947's *Out of the Past*, starring Robert Mitchum and Jane Greer.

But loyalty and trust are not qualities much appreciated in Hollywood. Concerned that *Curse*'s thrills and chills weren't visceral enough, the film's American producers had production designer Ken Adam create the titular demon. Sequences were then inserted into final print showing the scary (but obviously mechanical) creature killing Harrington in the opening sequence and menacing its intended victim in the conclusion (I won't spoil it here.) Cast and crew were greatly upset by the changes, especially Tourneur (unfortunately, the phrase "director's cut" did not exist yet). Despite these interferences, *Curse of the Demon* remains one of the best films of any genre.

SEAN PLUMMER

THE CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF

1961/UK/91 MIN
STARRING OLIVER REED CATHERINE FELLER AND CLIFFORD EVANS
DIRECTED BY TERENCE FISHER

Hammer Films' sole crack at the lycanthropic legend, *The Curse of the Werewolf*, is a tidy Christian re-mythologizing of the familiar wolfman tale, served up with the infamous British studio's trademark sex and gore. Transplanting Guy Endore's novel *The Werewolf of Paris* to 18th century Spain, the film intriguingly recasts the feared full moon affliction as a consequence of bad breeding and anti-societal tendencies.

Born to a mute servant girl viciously raped by a grubby beggar, the ill-fated Leon (Oliver Reed) is raised by adoptive parents who inhibit the bloodthirsty wolf within through caring and affection, a few slaughtered goats notwithstanding. Upon reaching adulthood, Leon seeks his fortune as a wine bottler and goes gaga over the vineyard boss' daughter, Christina (Catherine Feller). Unaware

The Curse of the Werewolf

of his transformative talents, he's confused when he awakens bloodied after a dalliance with a prostitute. His parents finally reveal his secret, but before he can elope with Christina and bask in her curative love, her father has him thrown in jail, inadvertently releasing the beast.

Attractively shot by Hammer stalwart Terence Fisher, *Curse* drips with foreboding, especially since the square-jawed Reed doesn't actually show up until half-way through it. Once he arrives and goes on a lycanthropic tear, however, the film gets surprisingly bloody very quickly – heightened by impressive makeup by Hammer's in-house effects artist Roy Ashton. *Curse*'s curious, religious view of lycanthropy is by far the most interesting aspect of the film, though, with a highly allegorical plot line stressing that love really does conquer all, and primitive lust should be suppressed by any means necessary. Apparently, the upper lip is the only thing that should remain stiff. **PAUL CORUPE**

CURTAINS

1983/CANADA/89 MIN
STARRING JOHN VERNON, SAMANTHA EGGAR AND LYNNE GRIFFIN
DIRECTED BY RICHARD CIUPKA

We miss you, John Vernon. The Canadian character actor, who died in 2005, cut one of the meanest profiles in Hollywood, playing heavies and authority figures on TV and in films such as *Point Blank*, *Dirty Harry*, *Animal House* and *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. And, for us Canuxploitation lovers, he'll always be remembered for his turn as sleazy producer Jonathan Stryker in the 1983 Canadian tax shelter slasher *Curtains*.

Vernon appears alongside another familiar face in vintage hoser horror, Samantha Eggar (*The Brood*, *The Uncanny*), who plays Samantha Sherwood, an aspiring leading lady who gets herself committed to an asylum in order to study for a role as a mental patient in Stryker's latest movie. But in the dick move of all dick moves, he abandons her there and invites a bunch of wannabe starlets out to his mansion in the woods to compete for the part. She escapes and arrives to join the audition process (tense? You bet), and someone starts killing off the girls.

What elevates this above the average hack 'em up – aside from a great performance from Vernon as King of the Cads – are some particularly frightening moments, notably the most famous scene of a skater attacked by someone in an old hag's mask. Only in Canada does a killer with three blades need two of them to get around.

Curtains is another one of the great under-the-radar horror flicks woefully neglected in the DVD boom, which has unearthed and polished many a lesser gem with special edition re-releases. **DAVE ALEXANDER**

DEAD & BURIED

1981/USA/94 MIN
STARRING JAMES FARENTINO
MELODY ANDERSON AND JACK ALBERTSON
DIRECTED BY GARY A. SHERMAN

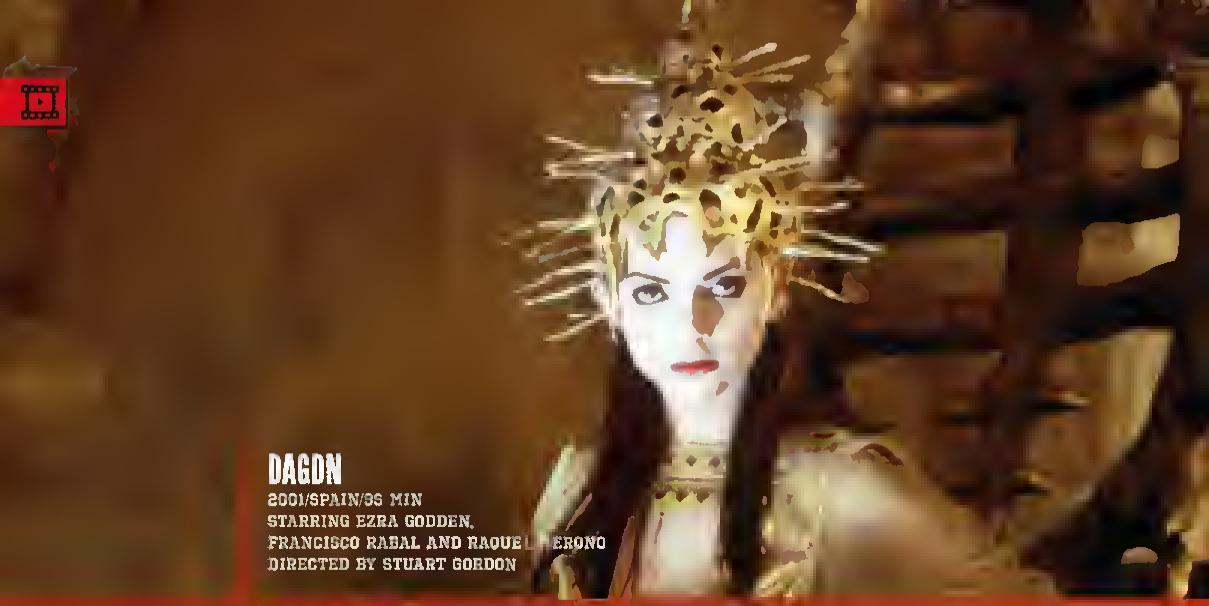
Imagine a demonic cross between Herk Harvey's *Carnival of Souls* and those old black-hearted EC Comics where corpses rise from the grave seeking vengeance, served with a generous dollop of '80s slasher gore, and you've got *Dead & Buried*.

James Farentino (*The Final Countdown*) stars as Dan Gillis, the sheriff of Potters Bluff, a tiny fishing community where strangers are warmly welcomed before being brutally murdered, only to reappear around town as fine, upstanding citizens. Gillis enlists the aid of the town's elderly coroner/mortician, William G. Dobbs (Jack Albertson), a cranky eccentric with a fondness for big band music, and an attention to detail in the reconstruction of damaged corpses that goes a little too far. Now-forgotten starlet Melody Anderson, fresh off the massive flop *Flash Gordon*, plays Gillis's school teacher wife, Janet, who teaches her students about voodoo and the reanimation of corpses!

Dead & Buried's cult reputation has bloomed over the years thanks to several factors: a genuinely creepy atmosphere (credit cinematographer Steve Poster), solid acting (especially from veteran Albertson in his final film role), a pre-Freddy Krueger appearance by Robert Englund, gruesome gore effects and the notoriety of credited screenwriters Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett, hot off the success of *Alien*. Well worth any and all efforts to prevent the film from living up to its title.

SEAN PLUMMER

Dead & Buried



DAGON

2001/SPAIN/96 MIN
STARRING EZRA GODDEN,
FRANCISCO RABAL AND RAQUEL MERONO
DIRECTED BY STUART GORDON

Those who endorse Stuart Gordon's grudging admission that he is "the Orson Welles of horror" – a director whose best film remains *Re-Animator*, his outrageous splatstick debut – obviously haven't seen *Dagon*. For this moist and moody pic remains his most accomplished but unjustly underrated offering.

An adroit amalgamation of "Dagon" (H.P. Lovecraft's first published story in 1917) and "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" (1936), the unified narrative follows Paul Marsh (Ezra Godden), a dotcom millionaire vacationing with his girlfriend Barbara (Raquel Moreno) off the coast of Spain. A storm scuttles their boat on the rocks, forcing the pair to seek help in the small fishing village of Imboca. They are soon separated and Paul finds himself pursued by Imboca's inhuman residents. Fleeing, he encounters Ezequiel (Francisco Rabal in his final role), the province's last human, who tells Paul that the villagers have disavowed God in favour of an aquatic deity known as Dagon. Since then, the people have been mutating into a fish-like species and are now offering their god human sacrifices.

As Lovecraft's most impassioned cinematic champion, Gordon appreciates the conundrum in attempting to visualise the unspeakable horrors of the author's works ("In film you must show the audience something," he ponders, "but with Lovecraft how much is too much?"). *Dagon* answers that question by dispensing with the crack-brained excesses of *Re-Animator* and intrusive kinkiness of *From Beyond*. It captures the atmospheric texture and bleak tone of Lovecraft better than any HPL adaptation ever has, building towards an unexpectedly moving and haunting climax that lingers in the memory.

No ordinary fish story, the soft-spoken Stuart Gordon dishes the facts on his horror opus.

You had wanted to make* Dagon *directly after* Re-Animator. *What happened?

The company that was originally going to produce the film didn't like the story. They thought it was ridiculous and as a matter of fact that was the problem we had for fifteen years. People would start laughing when they heard the idea of a movie where people started turning into fish. That's why it took so long to get *Dagon* made.

How did the project get re-activated?

It was really because Brian Yuzna started the Fantastic Factory for Filmax and was able to pick and choose the projects he wanted to do. He called me up and said, "I think we can finally get this movie made." For the most part the script stayed the same, but as we got closer to shooting we did make some changes.

It's interesting to think what* Dagon *would have been if you'd made it in 1985.

Well, it would have starred Jeffrey Combs and Barbara Crampton! We even named the heroine Barbara in honour of Barbara Crampton. By the time we were ready to make Dagon both of them were a little too old to play Paul and Barbara.

Did you have a strong sense of what the visual style of* Dagon *should be before you started shooting?

Yeah, I did. When we were originally going to do the movie I'd been thinking that the creatures should look exactly as Lovecraft described them – half-human, half-frog-like –

Dagon

but whenever we did concept drawings they always looked like the Creature from the Black Lagoon. When I was in Galicia, Spain, where we shot *Dagon*, I discovered a dish called "Pulpo Gallego" which is octopus. I suddenly thought, "Wouldn't it be interesting if these creatures were octopus-like and had no skeletons?" That idea changed our whole direction and we went with the fish-people.

Why is Dagon shot almost entirely with a hand-held camera?

I felt that it should have a documentary-like feeling, and was very interested in Lars von Trier's Dogme concept. I thought it would be cool to use that approach and make *Dagon* look like a Dogme movie, but have it be about something that was completely unnatural and preposterous. There is no dialogue for large stretches of the film, and I think we took our lead from Lovecraft on that. I mean, *Dagon* starts with a couple and then we get rid of Barbara pretty early on, so Paul is alone and there is nobody for him to talk to. You may also notice there are no subtitles in the movie, which gave it an alienating, mysterious quality. I wanted the audience to feel what Paul was feeling – that he didn't understand what people were saying.

There's an authenticity about the location you used for Imboca.

That town was a really atmospheric, foggy place. There was something about it that seemed very Lovecraftian. It's actually called Combarro and we ended up using that name for the character in the film. It means "marshland" and in the original story the character's name is Paul Marsh, so it seemed like Combarro would be the Galician equivalent. Interestingly, in Spanish Imboca means "in the mouth," which was a joke on "Innsmouth" – Lovecraft's name for the town. Lovecraft's story is set in New England and rather than trying to recreate Massachusetts we decided on Galicia. On a sunny day Combarro was charming but when it was overcast it took on this sinister, creepy feeling.

After struggling to get Dagon made, were you satisfied with the results?

Yeah, and I was actually grateful that we hadn't made *Dagon* earlier because the original idea was to show a lot more of the creatures. I think it was better not to because with Lovecraft the more you leave things to your imagination, the better it works.

MICHAEL DOYLE

DEAD OF NIGHT

1945/UK/103 MIN
STARRING MERVYN JOHNS, FREDERICK VALK AND MICHAEL REDGRAVE
DIRECTED BY ALBERTO CAVALCANTI, CHARLES CRICHTON, BASIL DEARDEN, ET AL

One of the most influential "portmanteau" films ever concocted, this British horror masterpiece from the '40s was a precursor to the great Amicus anthologies of the '60s and '70s.

Mervyn Johns (*Invasion of the Triffids*) stars as Walter Craig, an architect invited to spend the weekend at a country manor with half a dozen strangers. When he lays eyes upon the other guests, he remembers having seen them all from a recurring dream. Much to their astonishment, he predicts with incredible accuracy all sorts of incidents that follow – the sudden appearance of another member of the party, a pair of broken spectacles, etc. The mood grows ominous when he foretells of events far more malevolent than any of these mundane happenings.

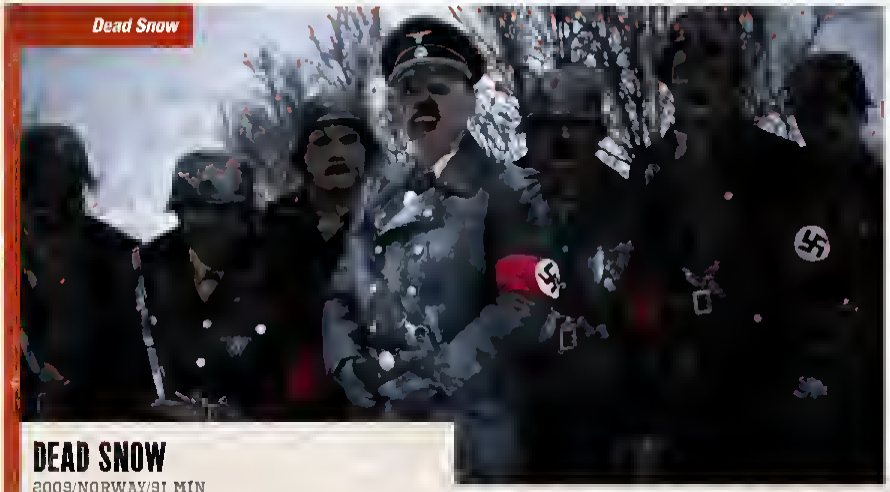
Waiting for his predictions to transpire, the guests share their own tales of the unexpected, while the psychiatrist of the group does his best to offer scientific explanations for the uncanny events. Anticipating the varied tonalities of the *Twilight Zone*, each episode has its own distinct character.

The first tale concerns a race car driver who, after narrowly cheating death, is dogged by a mysterious hearse driver who repeatedly delivers the chilling refrain, "Just room for one inside, sir." This idea was reworked into a famous installment of Rod Serling's classic television series.

In the second segment, a young girl playing hide and seek encounters the ghost of a small boy. The third story sees a man possessed by his reflection in a mirror. The fourth tale provides some comic relief when a dead golfer returns from the grave to haunt his former rival in both sports and love. But the last episode is the film's piece de resistance.

In it, Michael Redgrave (*The Innocents*) plays a ventriloquist tormented by his dummy, Hugo. The same concept would resurface in episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *Magic* (1978) starring Anthony Hopkins.

But as influential as it is to the horror genre, *Dead of Night* has also had an impact on the world of science. Its circular plot structure helped inspire the Steady State Theory of the Universe developed in opposition to the Big Bang. So as far as horror anthologies go, this one's a serious overachiever! **STUART F. ANDREWS**



DEAD SNOW

2009/NORWAY/91 MIN
STARRING BJORN SUNDQUIST LASSE VALDAL AND VEGAR HOEL
DIRECTED BY TOMMY WIRKOLA

It's not an especially original premise: a group of winsome students take off for a cabin in the mountains for a nice skiing holiday, only to encounter death, dismemberment, and unspeakable horror. But Norwegian filmmaker Tommy Wirkola executes his bloodcurdling tale of Nazi zombies with both skill and gusto.

After settling in, the seven adventurers are paid a visit by a suitably creepy local harbinger, who tells them stories of hidden Nazi gold and the horrors of occupied Norway during the Second World War, which were inflicted by a ferocious commander named Herzog, who is assumed to have frozen to death after the locals rebelled against the regime and drove him and his troops into the mountains in the dead of winter. The students are an endearing bunch (one of them's even a genre nut, bless his heart), which makes it all the more gut-wrenching when, on discovering the Nazi treasure, they start getting picked off by the undead in all manner of gruesome ways.

Wirkola's rotters are more monstrous personifications of evil than shuffling, braindead horde, which makes it all the more satisfying when the students begin fighting back – with pickaxes, chainsaws, and decades-old hand grenades. That said, the skinbags are as flesh-hungry as any of George Romero's creations, and the gore gags are an absolutely horrific delight, pity the poor gal who awakes after being knocked out by a zombie to find the monster snacking on her intestines. That gruesome humour is what truly makes this effort shine: as with the best horror comedies (think *Shaun of the Dead*), the strong writing not only makes for a hilarious movie, but the comedy also adds a touch of pathos in places that actually heightens the horror. Definitely one for the long winter nights, when the snow's falling gently outside.

CLAIRE HORNSNELL

DEATHDREAM

1972/CANADA/88 MIN
STARRING RICHARD BACKUS LYNN CARLIN AND JOHN MARLEY
DIRECTED BY BOB CLARK

Before heading north of the border to change the face of Canadian horror with *Black Christmas*, Bob Clark made this devastating critique of the Vietnam war in which a mother's wish for the return of her son killed in action ends in total terror.

The Brooks family is shocked and relieved when their son Andy (Richard Backus), previously reported dead, returns home from his tour of duty. Though the family is at long last reunited, things are far from happy – it's soon obvious that Andy is still dead, a slowly decomposing zombie that needs to replenish himself with fresh blood to stay above ground. Despite his mother's insistence that nothing has changed, Andy's ghoulish behavior does not go entirely unnoticed as he goes to increasingly extreme measures to keep fresh crimson pumping through his veins.

A remarkable leap in storytelling and craft beyond Clark and Ormsby's earlier cult classic *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*, *Deathdream* mixes social commentary

with the twisted pulp tone of an E.C. comics plot as the Brooks' inability to deal with their son's death starts to rot away at the family, just as Andy's own body decomposes into dust. But the film also looks at the way surviving Vietnam vets struggled to reintegrate themselves into society, dealing with an inner turmoil that has them struggling with substance abuse and with reestablishing formerly solid relationships. Featuring the effects work of Tom Savini on his first professional feature film, this truly terrifying vision effectively blurs the line between the living and the dead in a way that's rarely been seen since. **PAUL CORUPE**

DEMONS

1985/ITALY/88 MIN
STARRING URBANO BARBERINI, NATASHA HOVEY AND KARL ZINNY
DIRECTED BY LAMBERTO BAVA

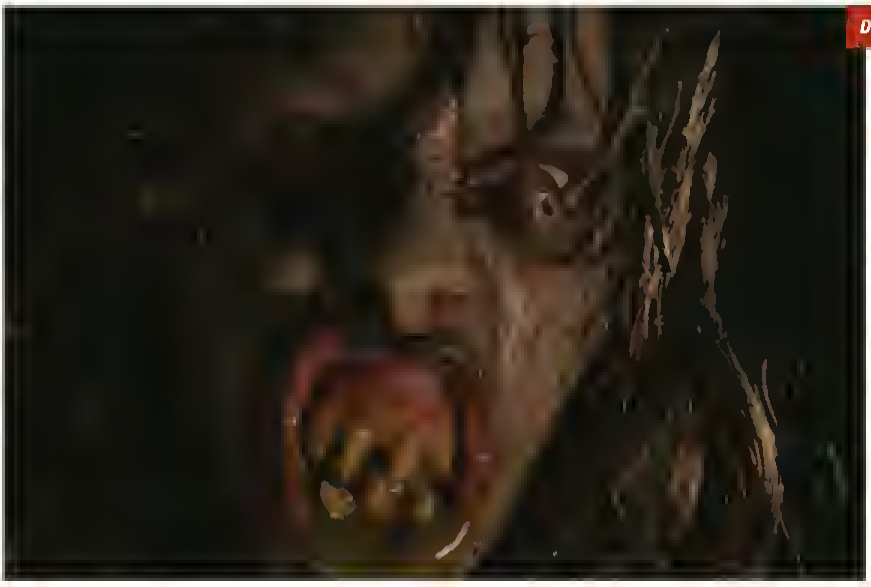
Ah the sweet scent of Italian splatter! Long beloved by the European horror community and cut to shreds by North American censors, Italy's gore films are the stuff of legend. And on that legendary heap rests this film, if only because it's the first joint achievement between virtually every name in the Italian horror community.

Produced by Dario Argento, *Demons* was directed by Lamberto Bava, son of Mario Bava, long revered as the patriarch of Italian horror. Sergio Stivaletti, who is Italy's version of Tom Savini, handled the gore effects and Claudio Simonetti (formerly of Goblin) composed the score. Michael Soavi (who went on to direct *Cemetery Man*) stood in for a part of a sinister theatre patron. And even Argento's first-born daughter, Fiore, joined in as one of the film's many victims.

A party favourite, *Demons* also tells a pretty respectable horror story. It begins when a man wearing a metal face-mask (Soavi) hands out free tickets to the Metropol, an old movie theatre in the heart of Berlin. Patrons congregate there one evening, only to discover that the place is showing a horror film – something about demons getting woken up in a cemetery. Basically, as in Bigas Lunas' *Anguish* but with supernatural monsters, whatever happens in the movie starts happening in the theatre.

The concept is pulled off with plenty of attention to pacing and a clever montage that criss-crosses movie and audience. Beyond that, the film sets itself up as a failsafe gore extravaganza; whenever anyone gets scratched, bitten or hurt by one of the monsters, they turn into one. True to its splatter roots, with plenty of laughs and gross-outs, *Demons* is a self-indulgent, over-the-top homage to a great tradition of fun monster films. Proof: a swarm of demons claws its way through hordes of screaming people, while the music of Motley Crue, Scorpions, Billy Idol, Accept and Saxon thumps in the foreground.

There's only one way this film can go, and it goes. **RODRIGO GUDIÑO**



Demons

Deranged

DERANGED

1974 CANADA USA/84 MIN
STARRING ROBERTS BLOSSOM, COSETTE LEE AND MICKI MOORE
DIRECTED BY JEFF GILLEN AND ALAN ORMSBY

Feeling like a backwoods horror flick from the vault? You can't do better than *Deranged*, a memorable, landmark film that also happens to be a cannibal class*ick*.

The low-budget classic retelling of the story of real life American serial killer Ed Gein, *Deranged* (1974) follows Ezra Cobb (Roberts Blossom), a devoted son pushed over the edge by his mother's death into a world of grave robbing, necrophilia and murder. With primitive direction from Jeff Gillen and Alan Ormsby (*Popcorn*), and a sinister soundtrack reminiscent of the splatter films of H.G. Lewis, *Deranged* follows in the tradition of gritty, documentary-style horror of the 1970s, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (released the same year) and *The Last House on the Left*. Despite the inclusion of a distracting narrator who continually interrupts the action, the sleazy documentary feel gives it a surreal vérité vibe, and Blossoms' soft-spoken demeanour is completely unnerving.

Though it's considerably moody and atmospheric, *Deranged* comes off almost comedic in its first half, thanks to the sheer weirdness of its characters and off-kilter dialogue. Once Ezra's murderous ways begin, however, a tone of dead seriousness sets in with some downright shocking results, notably the furniture and trinkets he fashions from dead bodies. The film was cut to avoid an X-rating, and it's goriest scene, in which Ezra uses a spoon to scoop out the eyeballs and brains of his former teacher, was snipped and left off the North American DVD. However, it was restored for a Region 2 German DVD reissue several years ago, but you can also see it on YouTube, thanks to producer Tom Karr, who uploaded it. The best part? The gag represents some of the first work of effects man Tom Savini. They just don't make 'em like this anymore. AARON VON LUPTON

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

2001/SPAIN MEXICO/106 MIN
STARRING FERNANDO TIELVE, FEDERICO LUPPI AND EDUARDO NORIEGA
DIRECTED BY GUILLERMO DEL TORO

Call *The Devil's Backbone* a cultural casualty of 9/11. One of Guillermo del Toro's best works, it had the misfortune of being released just after the terrorist attacks, and thus disappeared almost immediately.

A truly unique premise, it's a ghost story framed by the real-life horror of the Spanish Civil War. Dumped at a rural orphanage, a young boy named Carlos (Fernando Tielve) finds himself faced with a harsh new existence, under squalid conditions, he must come to terms with the loss of his father while forging new friendships and fending off rivals. And it's all set against the growing threat of annihilation from warring factions outside the compound's walls.

And that's not where Carlos' tribulations end, soon after arriving, he encounters the orphanage's resident restless spirit, known as The One Who Sighs and rumoured to be the ghost of a young boy who disappeared one night when a stray bomb fell into the orphanage courtyard and failed to detonate. (The bomb – having been defused – remains half-buried in the courtyard.) After a few encounters with the ghost – which surely rank among the most sublimely creepy moments in recent film history – Carlos gradually becomes aware that this spirit means him no harm but desperately wants him to expose the truth behind its death. It also seems to be trying to warn him that he and the others are in grave danger from someone within the orphanage as well as the warfare outside.

The Devil's Backbone is a minor masterpiece in terms of writing, directing, acting and design. Without ever conspicuously shifting gears, it's alternately suspenseful, frightening, heartbreaking, occasionally humorous and ultimately hopeful. Even if Del Toro had never made a film half as remarkable as *The Devil's Backbone* (but of course he made *Pan's Labyrinth*), he'd still have much to be proud of. JOHN W. BOWEN

DIABOLIQUE

1955/FRANCE/114 MIN
STARRING SIMONE SIGNORET, VERA CLOUZOT AND PAUL MEURISSE
DIRECTED BY HENRI GEORGES CLOUZOT

Decades before movies such as *The Usual Suspects* and *The Sixth Sense* trained audiences to look for the aces tucked up a filmmaker's sleeve, French director Henri-Georges Clouzot set the standard for twist endings with his adaptation of Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac's novel *She Who Was No More*. According to popular lore, Clouzot bested Alfred Hitchcock for the rights to the book (the authors also wrote the novel upon which *Vertigo* is based), and Hitch spent the next few years trying to outdo *Diabolique*'s final, wicked reveal. Whether he ever succeeded is still up for debate.

Combining elements of film noir and horror, *Diabolique* is a nasty tale of betrayal and abuse. Vera Clouzot (the director's wife) stars as Christina, a meek teacher at a run-down boarding school. She has inherited the place but her brutish, womanizing husband, Michel (Paul Meurisse), acts as headmaster. Christina forms an unlikely friendship with Michel's mistress, Nicole (Simone Signoret), and the women cook up a plot to murder the reviled headmaster and dump his body in the school's stagnant swimming pool. But after they think the deed is done, the corpse soon vanishes, and Christina begins to wonder if her husband has returned from the grave, or if she and Nicole didn't quite kill him enough to begin with.

Diabolique is most famous for its last few hair-raising moments, but the rest of the film deserves just as much notoriety. The true test of any movie with a twist ending lies in how well it plays upon subsequent viewings, and it's here that *Diabolique* truly stands out. Once you know what lies beneath its inky surface, the tale becomes even more sinister and disturbing. In the best horror films, things aren't as bad as they seem – they're much, much worse. APRIL SNELLINGS

DOG SOLDIERS

2002/UK/105 MIN
STARRING SEAN PERTWEE, KEVIN MCKIDD AND EMMA CLEASBY
DIRECTED BY NEIL MARSHALL

It's supposed to be a routine training exercise for one small group of British soldiers, but, as we all know, these things never go as planned in the movies. Under the command of Sergeant Harry G. Wells (Sean Pertwee), the men are dropped into the remote Scottish highlands to do mock battle with an elite Special Forces Unit. Things go south pretty quickly, however, when, late in the day, they discover the bloody, shredded remains of the group they were supposed to be up against, apparently destroyed in a savage animal attack – an attack that leaves just one survivor, the irascible and badly injured Captain Ryan (Liam Cunningham). As darkness falls, the group is rescued by a mysterious woman named Megan (Emma Cleasby), a zoologist, who shelters them in an apparently abandoned

Dog Soldiers

farmhouse. Once holed up, the soldiers find themselves in a brutal battle for survival against monsters of the lycanthrope persuasion.

The debut movie of director Neil Marshall, who followed up with 2005's critically acclaimed *The Descent*, *Dog Soldiers* is a fast-paced, low-budget werewolf flick that foreshadows many of the elements that made *The Descent* so effective: the classic horror scenario of a small group of largely sympathetic characters trapped in a confined space and forced to confront not only the monsters outside, but the ones within, mixed with sharp dialogue, genre references aplenty and some genuinely terrifying monsters on the other side of the walls. Marshall is stingy with his 'wolves, rarely revealing them in all their horror, it's an old trick but remains astonishingly effective in building an atmosphere of suspense and confusion as the soldiers – and viewers – are left wondering if they can trust their own eyes. Bloody and brilliant.

CLAIRE BOOSNELL

DUEL

1971/USA/90 MIN
STARRING DENNIS WEAVER, JACQUELINE SCOTT AND EDDIE FIRESTONE
DIRECTED BY STEVEN SPIELBERG

Steven Spielberg's feature debut is riveting in a way that few films are able to rivet. Adapted from his own short story by genre legend Richard Matheson (*I Am Legend*), *Duel* is a simple parable about peeling away the veneer of civilized society to reveal the primitive forces that drive the human animal. It's a relentless game of cat and mouse that wastes no time getting down to business and rarely stops to take a breath. Dennis Weaver stars as David Mann, a middle-aged schmuck who lets life kick him around. Driving home from a business trip across the sun-bleached desert highways of California, he unwittingly sets forth a disastrous course of events when he overtakes a crazy truck driver (whom we never actually see for the entire film). What follows is one brutally tense scenario after another, as the driver proceeds to harass and harangue Mann for the entire 90 minutes. With his options running low, the otherwise timid hero is forced to fight back with all the intensity his survival instincts will provide.

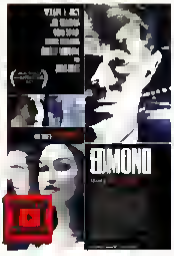
Weaver spends most of his time isolated on the screen running through a range of extreme emotional states. It's an impressive, virtuoso performance from the actor although he may very well be upstaged by his co-star – the brown tanker truck that's easily one of the most intimidating villains to ever appear on-screen. It's a greasy, junkyard dragon that broods, stalks and pounces on its prey always belching forth an endless stream of thick, black smoke.

While made for television, Spielberg managed to pull off a wide-open, cinematic experience using just about every focal length and camera angle imaginable. He had only ten days to shoot so the studio wanted him to work largely on sound stages with process shots but the hungry, young director defied them by filming the entire movie on location, devising a number of clever, economic tactics to stay on schedule. What results is an incredibly ambitious effort from an inspired filmmaker that's far more accomplished than it has any right to be.

STUART F. ANDREWS

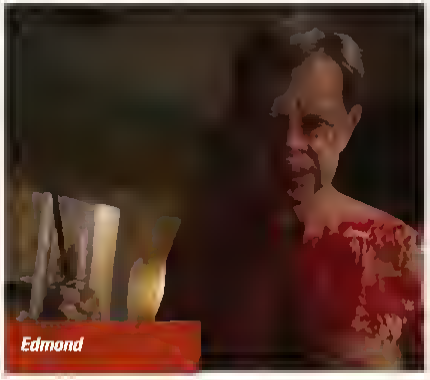
EDMOND

2005/USA/82 MIN
STARRING WILLIAM H. MACY, JULIA STILES AND JOE MANTEGNA
DIRECTED BY STUART GORDON



Think of every role you've seen the brilliant, Oscar-nominated actor William H. Macy in. He generally plays the part of the naive, doe-eyed failure – socially and emotionally stunted men who just can't keep up with the world around them, yet manage to endear themselves to audiences by way of naked innocence. Now, place a sharp blade in his hands and let him loose for a night of rage-fuelled insanity, and you have *Edmond*.

Macy plays the titular role of a near-autistic businessman who leaves his wife in search of some personal fulfillment. Hopping from strip club, to peep show, to brothel, Edmond's unfiltered diatribes find him on the losing end of every social interaction he encounters, until he meets a server at a diner who seems to like the poor sap. Her


Edmond

affection is reciprocated, but the wrong choice of words sends Edmond into a rage and he dices her up and flees the scene. His antics see him end up in prison, yet it's behind bars where he finally feels fulfilled.

Between writer David Mamet's typically expletive-laden script (based on his play of the same name), Stuart Gordon's distinct lens, the star-studded cast (including Joe Mantegna, Julia Stiles, Denise Richards and Mena Suvari) and Macy's positively crackers turn as Edmond, it's a wonder that the film isn't more of a cult hit. Sure, it's not your run-of-the-mill slasher fare, but *Edmond* is one of the most oddball entries into horror cinema you have never seen. And you should fix that right away.

TAL ZIMERMAN

EMBODIMENT OF EVIL

2008/BRAZIL/94 MIN
STARRING JOSE MOJICA MARINS, RUI REZENDE AND JECE VALADAO
DIRECTED BY JOSE MOJICA MARINS

No, Coffin Joe isn't that guy who gave you cigarettes in high school. He's the creation of Brazilian bad boy of blasphemy Jose Mojica Marins, and has been intermittently terrorizing screens since his 1963 debut, *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*. Adorned with his trademark cape, top hat, and long finger nails, Zé do Caixão (translated as "Uncle Coffin" in his native land) lives for two reasons: to find a mate worthy of continuing his bloodline, and to be a nuisance to fellow Brazilians, who hang on to Catholic traditions.

After more than 40 years since the release of the second installment of his trilogy, *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse* (1967), Coffin Joe returned to slap faces and eat meat on Fridays with the shockingly gruesome *Embodiment of Evil*. In it, Joe is released from prison to discover that four decades in the clink has only strengthened his resolve and has offered time to build an underground cult whose followers selflessly assist his quest to find a bride. His problem is that he is repeatedly haunted by his past victims and is plagued by nightmarish visions of pain and suffering. Joe's devotees continue to kidnap women for him to "sample," but the police soon close in. As the story unfolds, we're treated to plenty of gore, nudity and more sadism than you can shake a black top hat at. The garish occult sex and torture rituals have to be seen to be believed – scenes such as a naked woman being sewn into the carcass of a pig.

Despite decades of his baltsy, challenging, and downright freaky presence, Coffin Joe still remains somewhat of an oddity in horror circles. Sure, his native Portuguese will throw some viewers off and his pointed opposition to Catholicism risks alienating believers and non-believers alike, but the fact that *Embodiment of Evil* is his most wicked and disturbing project yet, proves that he deserves the top-tier icon status he has yet to achieve. TAL ZIMERMAN

Embodiment of Evil

10 MADE FOR TV TERRORS YOU NEED TO SEE

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

Dark Night of the Scarecrow

DARK NIGHT OF THE SCARECROW

1981/USA/96 MIN

A large, enthusiastic turnout at a Rue Morgue CineMacabre screening – after which the screenwriter in attendance is hounded for autographs – isn't anything new, but when the film in question is a made-for-TV movie nearly 30 years old at the time, it all smacks of pop culture immortality. This tale of a gentle retarded man lynched for a crime he didn't commit returning to exact vengeance on his killers has an undercurrent of viciousness missing from many of its network contemporaries, and its themes of bigotry and petuness in small-town America reach far beyond genre film boundaries.

DESPERATION

2006/USA/131 MIN

It's understandable that frequent Stephen King collaborator Mick Garris remains best known for directing the record-breaking miniseries *The Stand*, but *Desperation* – in which a random group of strangers run afoul of an evil entity in a small, abandoned desert town – deserves a damn sight more attention than it's gotten. Handling ensemble casts is one of Garris' strengths, and he's well served here by Tom Skerritt, Ron Perlman, Charles Durning and many more. His deft and darkly witty touches also go a long way toward keeping *Desperation* from looking like typical latter-day network fodder.

HELTER SKELTER

1976/USA/113 MIN

Its flaws are more evident today, but this account of the Manson murders and the subsequent trial – adapted from prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi's bestseller – scared the crap out of an entire generation of viewers, and is rightly considered a TV milestone. Steve Railsback is riveting as Charles Manson, and horror devotees understandably fawn over Marilyn Burns – fresh off *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* – as flaky psycho Linda Kasabian.

HORROR AT 37,000 FEET

1973/USA/73 MIN

A bald-faced attempt to capitalize on the success of *Airport* (1970) and the enduring popularity of the 1963 *Twilight Zone* episode *Nightmare at 20,000 Feet*? Hell yes, and why not? Passengers and crew of a transatlantic flight are terrorized by evil spirits unleashed from a relic in the cargo hold in this classic case of a feature attempting to cater to multiple contemporary audience demands. TV and B-movie royalty in the cast are simply too numerous to list here, but suffice to say William Shatner's performance threatens to chew a hole in the fuselage.

THE NIGHT STALKER

1972/USA/91 MIN

Darren McGavin plays a renegade reporter investigating a series of murders in Las Vegas that appear to have been committed by a vampire. As Kolchak, the actor is at his rumpled-yet-charismatic best in this undisputed TV classic from the prolific producer Dan Curtis, which spawned a solid sequel (*The Night Stranger*) and a grossly inferior series. Absolutely, unequivocally essential.

THE NORLISS TAPES

1973 USA 72 MIN

Son of Kolchak? It's easy to imagine that's what Dan Curtis had in mind here, and while it doesn't quite rise to the Dishevelled One's greatness, it remains a must-see. Ubiquitous '70s TV guy Roy Thinnes plays newsman David Norliss, who disappears while writing a book debunking supernatural phenomena. Through voice recordings he left behind, his publisher learns of the writer's investigation into an alleged attack on a widow (Angie Dickinson) by her late husband, which happens to coincide with some nearby murders. Vamps? Zombies? We ain't sayin'.

THE PLUMBER

1979/AUSTRALIA/76 MIN

Shot for Australian TV by cult fave Peter Weir (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Last Wave*, *The Truman Show*), this seldom-seen psychological thriller has slowly gained a small cult following in North America and Europe through sporadic network exposure since the early '80s. Judy Morris plays Jill, a woman whose attempts to write her doctoral thesis are derailed by a suspiciously chatty handyman (Ivar Kants) who plays increasingly uncomfortable mind games with her Claustrophobic, character-driven and unforgettable

SALEM'S LOT

1979/USA/112 MIN

In the years immediately following *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*'s runaway success, Tobe Hooper still felt he had a great deal to prove, and this Paul Monash-scripted adaptation of Stephen King's early bestseller about a vampire infestation in a small Maine town provided the perfect vehicle. Diving headlong into an unfamiliar medium, Uncle Chainsaw serves notice that he's also a master of subtle scares and classic haunted house atmospherics, and he's helped by a solid cast

Salem's Lot, *Desperation*

(especially James Mason as villainous Straker). Even after multiple viewings, those floating dead kids still make me want my mommy.

SNOWBEAST

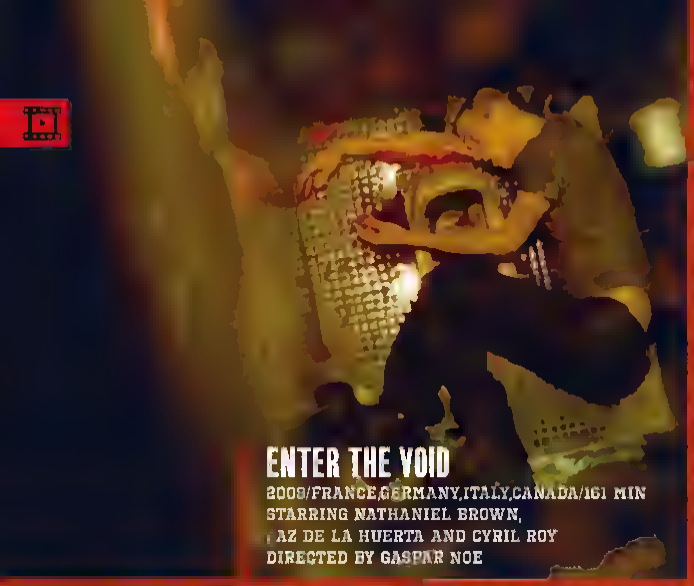
1977 USA 66 MIN

Bigfoot fever was peaking in America when this tale of a Colorado ski resort town terrorized by a buff-ugly, human-hatin' hairball hit small screens. In the TV horror canon, *Snowbeast* is unlikely to make anyone forget *Duel* or *Trilogy of Terror*, but it's good, campy fun and surprisingly violent for its time and medium. Great B-list cast too, including Bo Svensen, Yvette Mimieux, Clint Walker and his jaw.

THE WORLD BEYOND

1978/USA/60 MIN

Pilot for an aborted network series that foreshadowed *The X-Files*. Granville Van Dusen plays a sportswriter who, after a near-death experience during emergency surgery, begins receiving messages from the dead, directing him to help people under threat from supernatural forces. His first "case" involves a golem – a mythical, soulless mud-man found in Jewish folklore – that's terrorizing locals on an island off the coast of Maine. Not easy to find as of this writing, but like the truth, it's out there.



ENTER THE VOID

2009/FRANCE,GERMANY,ITALY,CANADA/161 MIN
STARRING NATHANIEL BROWN,
PAZ DE LA HUERTA AND CYRIL ROY
DIRECTED BY GASPAR NOE

The term "provocateur" – a person who deliberately pushes the envelope in an effort to solicit argument, controversy or backlash – may as well have been invented to describe Gaspar Noé. In 1998, the Argentinian-born French filmmaker's first feature, *I Stand Alone* (a.k.a., *Seul contre tous*), made waves in the film festival world with its brutal portrayal of a disgruntled, nameless French butcher and his relationship with his wife and daughter. Dark, dreary and difficult, the film signalled the arrival of a brave new voice in cinema.

With newfound notoriety but little financing, Noé then called upon his friends, Vincent Cassel and Cassel's real-life spouse Monica Bellucci, for his second effort, the bludgeoning *Irreversible*. A pulsing-red journey into the bowels of a gay sex club, *Irreversible* is a swirling descent into Hell that crescendos with a shocking, nine-minute rape scene in a Parisian pedestrian tunnel. The effect is numbing, and the film's premiere, at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival in France, produced one of the strongest reactions in the festival's history, with people fainting and angrily storming out of the theatre.

Although it divided audiences, critics applauded *Irreversible*'s raw, uncompromising storytelling, comparing Noé's work to that of one of his most prominent influences, legendary director Stanley Kubrick (*The Shining*, *Eyes Wide Shut*). An alliance with the Wild Bunch production company followed, and Noé began planning his dream project, *Enter the Void*, the genesis of which came from a screenplay for a sequel to Ken Russell's 1980 hallucinogenic classic *Altered States*.

"I was given the script for *Altered States 2* and didn't like it," Noé recalls at *Enter the Void*'s August 2010 screening at the Film Society of Lincoln Center in New York. "It wasn't very good and I couldn't make that movie. *Enter the Void* is my *Altered States*."

Like Russell's sci-fi head trip, *Enter the Void*'s story – a rough metaphor for the ability to guide one's consciousness through experiences that occur between death and reincarnation, as described in the Tibetan Book of the Dead – is told using unusual filmmaking techniques. It begins with the first-person perspective of Oscar (newcomer Nathaniel Brown) getting high, depicted via a conglomeration of brightly coloured, veiny circuits being soothed inside his brain. After a subsequent drug deal goes bad, Oscar runs into a bathroom stall where he tries to frighten the cops by declaring he has a gun. The police draw their own weapons, a shot is fired, and with the audience still sharing his perspective, he looks down in astonishment at his blood-covered hands and falls to the floor, his face inches from the urinal gutter. The rest of the film is seen from the point of view of Oscar's "ghost" as he visits various checkpoints throughout his past and watches over Linda, his troubled sister (Paz de la Huerta). For Noé, balancing moments of solace with horrendous twists not only imitates life but also serves to shock the viewer.

"The intention was to have the audience identifying with Oscar," explains Noé. "Life is made up of great, joyful moments, and lots of horrible, scary moments. Usually the bad moments are linked to moments where your brain reaches adrenaline, and it shakes the memories much more than the joyful moments. You're pushing the limits to create a reaction in the audience."

The film's world premiere at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival incited heavy criticism from moviegoers confronted with the often horrific depictions of drug use, the main character's early violent death, massive amounts of sex, car crashes and abortions.

"Some people got pissed off by the whole concept of the movie, or the whole perception of dysfunctional elements in the movie," Noé explains. "When you're doing movies, it's also like being a magician or a comedian on stage. You just want the audience to enjoy themselves. There are elements in my movie that come from general show business."

One of *Enter the Void*'s most shocking instances of said "show business" involves a large erect penis from an inside-the-vagina point of view. At the aforementioned showings in France and New York, audiences erupted with laughter.

"I think most people don't expect that image to arrive at that particular moment," he says. "Because it's totally unexpected, people have this reaction where they laugh at the end of the film. It's not meant to be funny."

Whatever the reaction, Noé is undeterred and plans to make a "romance" film full of explicit sex.

"I've actually started writing the script," he says. "I would love to do a love movie." **SHADE RUPE**

Enter the Void

The Entity

THE ENTITY

1982/USA/125 MIN
BARBARA HERSHEY, RON SILVER
AND DAVID LABIOSA
DIRECTED BY SIDNEY J FURIE

Remember that movie from the '80s about the woman who was being raped repeatedly – in her bedroom, her bathroom and even in front of her children – by a ghost? A fictionalization of one of the most extraordinary cases of paranormal activity ever recorded, *The Entity* stars Barbara Hershey as Carla, a single mom who's suddenly and violently sexually assaulted by an unseen force – over and over and agonizingly over again.

Like so many fledgling directors before him, Toronto native Sidney J. Furie made a few forays into the Hammer-horror style in the 1960s with *Dr Blood's Coffin*, *Snake Woman* and *Devil Doll*, but as the decade came to a close, he all but abandoned the genre for the safety of big budget drama with bona fide stars. It was almost twenty years before Furie would make a surprising return to horror to craft one of the finest – and most terrifying – ghost stories of the decade, a sober adaptation of Frank De Felitta's novel *The Entity*.

Relentlessly menacing the viewer with the most intimate type of personal violation, *The Entity* boasts exceptionally strong performances by Hershey and Ron Silver, as her skeptical physician, Dr. Sneiderman. Convinced that her attacks are psychological manifestations of a troubled childhood, Sneiderman not only acts as a concerned love interest, but also serves to showcase the film's dichotomy between scientific and paranormal explanations for strange phenomenon. As the psychiatrists and parapsychologists do battle over Carla's perplexing case, Sneiderman (and the viewer) must take a leap of faith as scientific experimentation and the arcane world of the occult are brought crashing together.

The Entity remains absolutely frightening in its inexhaustible assaults on both Carla and the audience, with extremely tilted camera angles giving the film a feeling of reality gone haywire. Also, Stan Winston contributes one of his most famous special effects, an animatronic breast that makes it look like Carla is being assaulted by an invisible hand, while the extremely aggressive score, composed by Charles Bernstein, attacks the audience – imagine Bernard Herrmann's score for *Psycho* performed with harsh synthesizer chords and thumping percussion. Few cinematic assaults have been so effective.

PAUL CORUPE

EVENT HORIZON

1997/USA/96 MIN
STARRING LAURENCE FISHBURNE, SAM NEILL
AND KATHLEEN QUINLAN
DIRECTED BY PAUL WS ANDERSON

Dismissed by some, lauded by others, *Event Horizon* arguably remains one of the most frightening sci-fi horror films to come out of Hollywood. It masterfully combines the psychological with the gory for maximum edge-of-your-seat tension in a story that follows the crew of a salvage vessel en route to the long-lost space ship the film is named for. Problem is, the vessel has been travelling through a Hell dimension – it not Hell itself – for the past seven years.

The crew, who are joined by Dr. William Weir (Sam Neill), designer of the Event Horizon, aren't aboard the

abandoned craft long before they experience horrific visions of their worst fears. Shortly thereafter their shipmates begin to turn up dead (by increasingly gory means – the medical bay evisceration scene stands out in particular, even after being cut to secure an R-rating). They soon discover that whatever has possessed the ship also has hold of one of their own and plans to take them straight back to Hell.

Evil Dead Trap

Event Horizon has been described as "*The Shining* in space," an apt comparison as it shares a similar escalating dread, unseen menace and terrifying hallucinations. But it's also one of the only films to make effective use of those much-lambasted quick-cut edits. Employed sparingly to show flashes of gory torture, it hints at a truly disturbing vision of Hell (try stepping through these sequences frame by frame for a closer look at some of the most intense gore scenes ever). Director Paul W.S. Anderson went on to helm the mind-numbing *Resident Evil* series, leaving behind his most accomplished feature, and perhaps a taste of what could've been a much more interesting career. **MONICA S. KUEBLER**

EVIL DEAD TRAP

1988/JAPAN/102 MIN
STARRING MIYUKI ONO, YUJI HONMA AND AYA KATSURAGI
DIRECTED BY TOSHIHARU IKEDA

You might say that horror's large cult following owes more to the school of visual design than to traditional filmmaking. While this wouldn't be apparent from watching the majority of North America's horror film vault, European contributions have been known to rest their bloody laurels on their artistic accomplishments, even if it is at the expense of basic storytelling and character development. Following in this European tradition is Japan's *Evil Dead Trap*.

The plot of *Evil Dead Trap* is neatly divided into two separate stories. The first half is a traditional horror tale centred around late-night TV host Nami, who one day receives an anonymous video tape depicting the savage torture of someone bearing a disturbing resemblance to herself. Along with her television crew, she tracks down the location where the footage was shot, which leads her to a government research facility (actually a US air force base). As they look around, each of the group members meets with a gruesome end via sadistic death traps that could only have been inspired by Dario Argento. When only Nami is left to survive, the film switches gears completely, with the introduction of a mysterious stranger on a quest.

Although technically superior to standard grindcore, *Evil Dead Trap* is one of those movies that can really only have a cult following. The opening story is minimalist, and the ending is basically nonsensical. What is important, however, is director Ikeda's ambitious visual style. The kill scenes are brutal but done the way a painter strokes his canvas with a brush and the surreal ending lingers like a photograph glued to your brain. If you're expecting some Sam Raimi film knock-off, get ready for a big surprise. To paraphrase a fellow horror fan: "I don't know if I like art films, but *Evil Dead Trap* rocks."

AARON VON LUPTON

THE EXORCIST III

1990/USA/110 MIN
STARRING GEORGE C. SCOTT, ED FLANDERS AND BRAD DOURIF
DIRECTED BY WILLIAM PETER BLATTY

Thirteen years after John Boorman's train-wreck sequel *Exorcist II: The Heretic* hit theatres, author William Peter Blatty took matters into his own hands and adapted and directed his 1983 novel *Legion* for the screen. Despite bearing only a tangential relationship with *The Exorcist*, producers insisted – over Blatty's objections – on calling the film *The Exorcist III*.

George C. Scott grouchily essays the film's detective protagonist, Lt. William Kinderman (a major supporting player in Blatty's *Exorcist* novel whose role in the film ver-

Exorcist III

sion – memorably played by Lee J. Cobb – was greatly diminished), whose investigation of a series of religious-themed murders seemingly committed by the long-dead Gemini Killer, leads him to a hospital psychiatric ward and an encounter with "Patient X," a man who carries the soul of the Gemini, and the face of Kinderman's friend, the deceased Father Damien Karras.

After viewing Blatty's thoughtful, character-driven director's cut, the producers demanded an exorcism scene be tacked on (to justify their already tacked-on title). Blatty grudgingly acquiesced, adding a new character, Father Morning (Nicol Williamson), to perform the superfluous service. But in a rare instance of studio interference creatively benefiting a film, Blatty took advantage of the opportunity to woo *Exorcist* star Jason Miller (who had been unavailable during the original shoot) to portray the mysterious Patient X – played in the first cut by Brad Dourif. Rather than replace Dourif's striking turn, Blatty blended the two performances in editing, resulting in something uniquely unsettling.

Even in its compromised form (sadly, Blatty's original cut has been lost), the film remains powerful and original, even more so considering its emergence from the gore-soaked, slasher-obsessed 1980s. Measured, atmospheric, nearly free of onscreen violence (though it does contain what may be the greatest jump scare in all of horror cinema), and driven by Blatty's gift for colourful, compelling dialogue, *The Exorcist III* remains an unjustly overlooked classic. JOSEPH O'BRIEN

EYES WITHOUT A FACE

1960/FRANCE ITALY/88 MIN
STARRING EDITH SCOB, PIERRE BRASSEUR AND ALIDA VALLI
DIRECTED BY GEORGES FRANJU

This masterpiece of medical horror is one of the most haunting, disturbing and elegantly crafted films ever made. The French weren't in the habit of churning out such lurid films at the beginning of the '60s, but the Hammer productions did so well over there that producer Jules Borkon was only too happy to jump on the bandwagon.

Enter Georges Franju, a surrealist director who fused the French art house with the drive-in horror film, elevating standard, pulpy themes to a genre-defying, cross-pollination of influences. He recruited screenwriting duo that went by Boileau-Narcejac (*Les diaboliques*, *Vertigo*) and the amazing Eugen Schüfftan, whose cinematography is unsurpassed – combining the diffused, ethereal tones of Jean Cocteau

Eyes Without a Face

with the dramatic expressionism of F.W. Murnau and the stark horrors of movies we'd eventually see by modern filmmakers like David Cronenberg.

Waifish actor Edith Scob stars as the delicate Christiane, a pretty girl whose face was completely destroyed in a driving accident caused by her father, the brilliant surgeon Dr. Génessier (Pierre Brasseur). Tormented by guilt and driven by professional ambition as much as any genuine concern for his daughter, Génessier recruits a former patient (Alida Valli: *Suspiria*) to help kidnap young, beautiful girls to use as unwitting guinea pigs for a series of horrifying face transplant experiments.

With a featureless mask instead of a face, the ethereal Christiane haunts her father's gothic manor like a perverse Snow White as Maurice Jarre's unearthly score sonically illustrates the nightmarish proceedings. Even by today's standards, this film is visceral and unflinching, but perhaps its most disturbing aspect is how cold and monstrous Christiane's father is revealed to be. An unfeeling sociopath with little regard for working class women, Génessier is Franju's indictment of economically privileged, Western patriarchy.

Eyes Without A Face had a massive impact on European horror films, influencing works by the likes of Jess Franco, Jean Rollin, Claude Mulot and, more recently, Pedro Almodovar. Even John Carpenter has suggested that the Michael Myers mask in *Halloween* was inspired by the movie. And let's not forget one of its most enduring legacies: the hit song of the same name by Billy Idol. **STUART F. ANDREWS**

FATHER'S DAY

2011/USA CANADA/93 MIN
STARRING ADAM BROOKS, MATTHEW KENNEDY AND CONOR SWEENEY
DIRECTED BY ADAM BROOKS, JEREMY GILLESPIE, MATTHEW KENNEDY, ET AL

Let's get something out of the way right off the hop: there is no comedic value in rape. Sexual intercourse with an unwilling participant under the threat of violence is, outside of murder, arguably the greatest violation one human being can inflict upon another. And yet, in the hands of prolific Winnipeg filmmaking collective Astron-6 – which taps the taboo subject – it's spun into gory grindhouse comedy gold. But before you write off the film as the tasteless dreck that it certainly could've been, and at face value appears to be, you should know that the multi-talented members of Astron-6 are preternaturally hilarious.

Their resulting salacious slice of celluloid – co-di-

rected by all five members of the collective, all of whom are also cast in the film, save for Steve Kostanski, who handles special effects – was years in the making, and is much more than just an outright desecration of dadhood. To provide a complete synopsis would be to spoil the many unexpected twists and turns the final film has to offer; all you really need to know is when a teenaged male prostitute named Twink (Conor Sweeney) finds himself a suspect in the brutal ravaging and murder of his own father, he is left in the care of a young priest named Father Sullivan (Mathew Kennedy), whose aged mentor alleges that the killer's modus operandi sounds strikingly similar to that of a notorious dad-rapist he whisperingly refers to as The Fuchman. The old padre recounts an almost mythical tale of a one-eyed man named Ahab (Adam Brooks), who, along with his estranged sister, has pledged to find the infamous "Father's Day Killer" and exact revenge for the murder of their own dad.

Before long, Father Sullivan coaxes Ahab out of his self-imposed exile and, along with Twink and Chelsea, the foursome navigates an ultra-sleazy landscape of monochromatic Argento-style mood lighting, throbbing synth music, graphic cannibalism, incest, boobs, spurting blood, buggery, an ancient tome, chainsaws, dinks, stop-motion monsters, magic berries and, naturally, maple syrup, in an epic quest to end Fuchman's dad-violation forever. Armed with only a micro-budget of $9800 and the filmmakers' collectively deranged sensibilities, *Father's Day* is a relentlessly offside odyssey that's bound to become a cult classic. **TREVOR TUMINSKI**

FIRE IN THE SKY

1993/USA/109 MIN
STARRING D.B. SWEENEY, ROBERT PATRICK AND CRAIG SHEFFER
DIRECTED BY ROBERT LIEBERMAN

Aliens are our modern-day boogeymen. Volumes have been written pointing out the similarities between accounts of alien abduction and legends about vampires, fairies, angels (admit it, angels are creepy) and even poltergeists. While scores of horror films throughout the decades have featured monstrosities from the wrong side of the intergalactic tracks, only a handful of movies have successfully conveyed the horror of alien abduction.

Fire in the Sky is based on one of ufology's most sensational episodes: the 1975 disappearance of Arizona logger Travis Walton and his even more perplexing reappearance five days later. According to Walton, he spent those days as the unwilling guest of fetus-like aliens who subjected him to a battery of horrific experiments. The movie is mostly concerned with the drama surrounding the search for Walton – the cops suspected he had been the victim of terrestrial foul play – but when a flashback finally takes us into the spaceship to witness Walton's ordeal, the results are terrifying.

The ship itself is nightmarish – imagine a *Hostel* torture chamber designed by H.R. Giger and decorated by

Father's Day

GOD TOLD ME TO

1976/USA/91 MIN
STARRING TONY LO BIANCO,
DEBORAH RAFFIN
AND SANDY DENNIS
DIRECTED BY LARRY COHEN

The eminent critic Robin Wood once opined that Larry Cohen was one of the most underrated writer/directors in contemporary American cinema. Those who remain undecided over whether the 71-year-old maverick is touched by genius or merely a purveyor of slack, sophisticated schlock need look no further than *God Told Me To* for evidence of his daring, polymathic qualities as a filmmaker. A complex, thematically rich, often bewildering picture, it stands as one of the great horror movies of the 1970s, and is almost as unique and difficult to categorize as Cohen himself.

Inspired by Erich von Daniken's 1968 book *Chariots of the Gods* (which propounds that many of the world's ancient religions and technologies were the product of a visitation from God-like aliens), Cohen's thought-provoking film is part police procedural, part apocalyptic sci-fi thriller. It centres on Peter Nicholas (Tony Lo Bianco), a devout but emotionally conflicted Catholic detective, who is investigating a series of seemingly random homicides that are linked by the murderers' calm confessions that God told them to perpetrate their crimes. He learns that each of the assassins had some contact with an enigmatic Christ-like figure (Richard Lynch) whose face they can not recall. Nicholas slowly comes to realise that his own history – and perhaps his destiny – is inextricably entwined with this mysterious being.

Marred by a strangely counteractive ad campaign and poor distribution (it was briefly released in theatres as *Demon*), and with infrequent television broadcasts for a film of its vintage, *God Told Me To* has until quite recently been far less visible – and by extension is far less revered – than Cohen's other celebrated horror films, *It's Alive* (1974) and *Q – The Winged Serpent* (1982).

We invited the legendary auteur to take a pew and give us the lowdown on his brave, baroque and utterly indispensable masterpiece.

Would you agree that* God Told Me To *illustrates your ability to successfully blend different genres, and reinvigorate oft-used conventions and ideas?

I think one of the reasons why *God Told Me To* seemed so fresh was that it took the semi-realism of a police drama like *Naked City* and played it directly against the horror and science fiction aspects of the story. Our movie had this hard documentary look, and we used a lot of hand-held camera to give us that same kind of immediacy. That concept was completely unique at the time. Of course, in the years since we made the picture, I've seen lots of films and television shows that have taken that same serious-minded approach. In fact, I consider *The X-Files* to be a total rip-off of *God Told Me To*, but back then nobody had ever really done that before in a horror movie.

The messianic figure of Bernard, the glowing hermaphrodite alien that is revealed to be willing the murders, is one of your most fascinating monsters.

I was working from the idea that if an alien with special powers had been raised on Earth in a predominantly

God Told Me To

Christian society it could possibly think that it was God due to the God-like abilities it possessed. This alien obviously believes itself to be God and is attempting to convince others that he is by making them commit these crimes. Now, anybody who was born into this world with those kinds of powers and grew up amongst normal human beings would at some point naturally perceive themselves to be divine. That concept seems completely logical to me. It's a similar idea to Superman, who is also a humanoid alien. Superman can fly, possesses great physical strength, and is clearly superior to normal people. If Clark Kent was exposed to religion from an early age and read the story of Jesus Christ – a man who apparently possessed the ability to heal the sick and resurrect himself from death – then Superman may also eventually mistake himself for God.

What are your memories of working with the late Richard Lynch?

Richard had this dangerous, otherworldly quality about him in his performances that I thought would be perfect for the part of the alien. I remember we were shooting the confrontation between the detective and his character inside this deserted tenement building in Manhattan. There were no dressing rooms for the actors, only these various rooms where they could change clothes. I walked into one of these rooms as Richard was changing and suddenly saw that his entire body was covered in scars. Apparently, several years earlier he had set fire to himself while high on drugs and had almost incinerated himself. He had this thick scar tissue crisscrossing his body, and I noticed this strange vaginal-like crevice on his chest. I said, "Richard, would you mind displaying your body as the body of the alien?" He said, "Sure, no problem." So that's exactly what we did. It was just something that occurred to me at that very moment. Richard was very nice and agreeable about it, but that is exactly how he looked in real life. That wasn't makeup.

MICHAEL DOYLE

Jeffrey Dahmer, and you'll get the idea. The experiments Walton endures, though sans gore and therefore relatively safe for the squeamish, have quiet echoes of Japan's notorious *Guinea Pig* films. These aren't the sort of aliens who have come to impart interplanetary wisdom; they're the sort who'll mutilate your cow just for the hell of it.

As horror films constantly remind us, bad things can happen when we venture too far from civilization. If masked slashers, hillbilly cannibals and man-eating monsters aren't already enough to keep you within two feet of a streetlight, *Fire In the Sky* should seal the deal. APRIL SNELLINGS

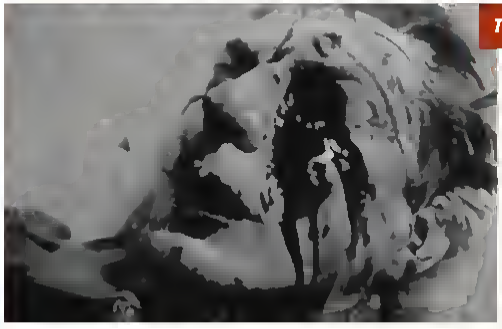
THE FLESH EATERS

1964/USA/87 MIN
STARRING BYRON SANDERS, MARTIN KOSLECK AND RAY TUDOR
DIRECTED BY JACK CURTIS

Competing directly for the title of the first gore classic with H.G. Lewis' notorious *Blood Feast*, this hyper-lurid exploitation shocker from director Jack Curtis is a pop surrealism masterpiece of beatniks, bacteria and heaving bosoms. It begins when bad weather forces charter pilot Grant Murdoch (Byron Sanders) to land on an uncharted island inhabited by a mysterious marine biologist, Professor Bartell (Martin Kosleck). Murdoch's passengers, an alcoholic actress (Rita Morley) and her cute assistant (Barbara Wilkin) start fearing for their safety when they discover the beach littered with fish bones – and maybe a few human femurs too.

Turns out Bartell is experimenting with flesh-eating microbes and wants a chance to try out his latest work on another recently arrived castaway, bongo-playing poet Omar (Ray Tudor, in a truly unhinged performance), but Murdoch is already close to uncovering Bartell's dark past as he looks for a way to get off the island before his own body is turned into swiss cheese.

Featuring spurting blood, an eyeless corpse and a body with its entire stomach eaten through, *The Flesh Eaters* impresses with its sometimes inventive effects (for example, the titular mini-monsters were created by poking pinholes in the celluloid itself to create an eerie shimmering effect). But even more notable is the frantic comic



The Flesh Eaters

book plotting by DC and Marvel veteran Arnold Drake – populated by flawed outcasts with sinister motives aggressively jockeying for position within the island's new makeshift social structure, it's the feisty dialogue and edgy characterizations that really makes *The Flesh Eaters* so much bloody fun. PAUL CORUPE

FRAILTY

2002/USA ITALY,GERMANY/100 MIN
STARRING BILL PAXTON
MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY AND POWERS BOOTHE
DIRECTED BY BILL PAXTON

What would you do if one day, your father told you that he was hand-picked by a fiery angel of vengeance to help rid the planet of demons? Would you laugh, cry, or pick up a hatchet and get started? This is the dilemma two young boys face in *Frailty*, actor Bill Paxton's directorial debut.

While making adjustments under the chassis of a car, a man sees the literal image of a sword-brandishing cherub who supplies him with the names of demons hiding out in his town, and instructs him to exact some biblical-style justice. The man attempts to enlist the aid of his sons, Adam and Fenton, one is quite eager and unquestioning, while the other is hesitant and shows worry for his father's mental health. Through the power of touch, the man can see his captives' transgressions, as can youngest son Adam, which sets Fenton at odds for his lack of this power. Because of his resistance, the father locks the elder son in a cellar until he claims a vision has corrected his path. When Fenton emerges, he is as driven as his father, albeit on a much different path.

The majority of *Frailty* is told in flashback, in the office of a police detective looking to piece the puzzle together, which allows for more mystery as the plot turns, twists and deepens with every revelation. Though perhaps falling more into thriller territory than out-and-horror, *Frailty* still oozes dread and tragedy. Paxton in his role as the dad deftly walks the line between apologetic and maniacal, and as director, coaxes honest and heartbreaking roles from his two young leads who both exhibit the kind of stress kids might be under should they be faced with such a biblical reality. TAL ZIMERMAN

GINGER SNAPS

2000 CANADA/108 MIN
STARRING KATHARINE ISABELLE,
EMILY PERKINS AND KRIS LEMCHE
DIRECTED BY JOHN FAWCETT

How we managed so long without a film that linked menstrual cycles with werewolves is beyond me. Luckily, a little Canadian film called *Ginger Snaps* popped up out of nowhere and boldly demonstrated how puberty really can be a bitch.

The Fitzgerald sisters are an odd pair of misfits that disassociate themselves from the rest of their preppy classmates. That is, until Ginger (Katharine Isabelle) is attacked by a big canine creature and starts developing an odd taste for blood, not to mention a set of fangs and a tail. Her sister, Brigitte (Emily Perkins), must find a way of curing her "condition" but soon Ginger

Ginger Snaps

doesn't seem all that bothered about being saved.

Ginger Snaps is a fierce take on classic werewolf folklore, there is relentless gore and it's never short of dark humour. Having the beast take female form opens the film to some interesting twists and takes the mythology in new directions. It also boasts one of the coolest opening credit sequences: a series of photos for a class project that depict the girls in staged suicides.

Werewolf movies have a tendency to walk a fine line between cool and lame when it comes to special effects, but *Ginger Snaps* knows when to reveal its badass beast and when to let the imagination take over. It's a damn travesty that the film does not grace more lists of the greatest werewolf films ever made because, simply put, it's ferocious. **CHARLOTTE STEAR**

HALLOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH

1982/USA/98 MIN
STARRING TOM ATKINS, STACEY NELKIN AND DAN O'HERLIHY
DIRECTED BY TOMMY LEE WALLACE

Halloween III was a colossal failure financially and critically, yet the problem didn't so much stem from an ill-conceived movie concept as from a miscalculation of just how popular knife-wielding boogeyman Michael Myers was, as his return in *Halloween II* had sliced up the box office just one year earlier.

Departing from the Myers slasher formula of the franchise's first two entries, *Halloween III* was a totally new story based around the Silver Shamrock Novelties company headed by a character played by the imposing Dan O'Herlihy (*Robocop*), who elaborately plots to kill all of the town's children on Halloween night with the evil masks he sells. It's a creepy concept for sure, and *Halloween III* seems to find the right balance between dark atmosphere and cheesy '80s horror awesomeness. Of course, any movie that gives license to lead actor Tom Atkins (*Night of the Creeps*) to put on one of his all-time great machismo roles has to be good, right?

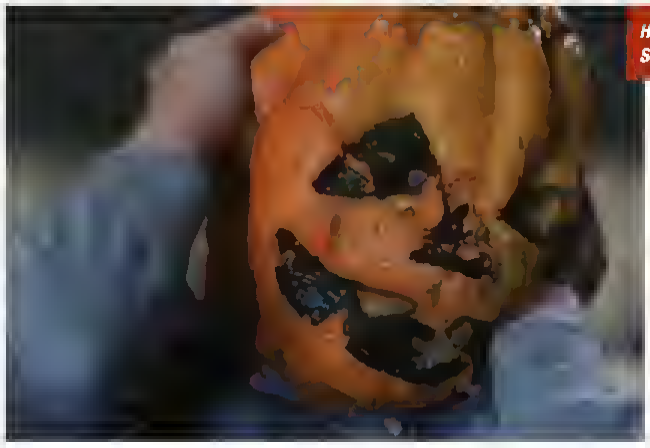
It's an interesting bit of psychology: horror fans have hated *Halloween III* for years but you have to think a simple title change would have made all the difference. Director Tommy Lee Wallace, production designer from the original *Halloween*, brings a very John Carpenter-esque style to the proceedings, and the soundtrack by Carpenter and regular collaborator Alan Howarth establishes that familiar Samhain atmosphere. Thankfully, after being marginalized for so long, *Halloween III* is now being rediscovered and has changed rank from being considered one of the worst to one of the best of the *Halloween* sequels. **AARON VON LUPTON**

HARDWARE

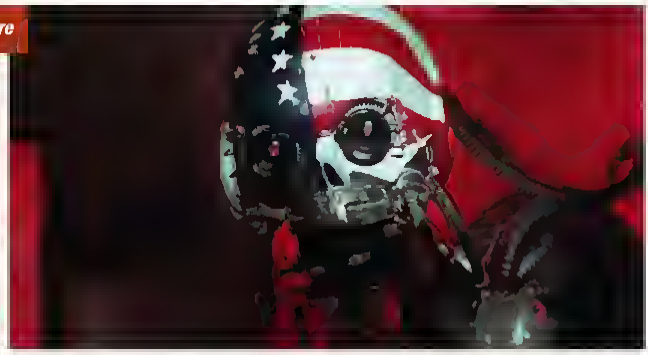
1990/UK,USA/94 MIN
STARRING DYLAN MCDERMOTT, STACEY TRAVIS AND JOHN LYNCH
DIRECTED BY RICHARD STANLEY

The place: Great Britain, circa the end of the '80s, where recession and the elimination of a government tax break had taken their toll. It was the beginning of the end for the UK film industry as the world had known it. From this climate of shifting sands emerged Richard Stanley's *Hardware*.

Set in a radiation-rotted future world, *Hardware*'s plot is, on the surface, relatively straightforward. Mo (Dylan McDermott) buys the remains of a freakish-looking robot and gives it to his sculptor girlfriend, Jill (Stacey Travis), who immediately begins to incorporate the 'droid into her art. But what first appear to be intriguing scraps of dead technology are actually core components of the biblically-christened M A R K 13, a nightmarish, govern-



Halloween III: Season of the Witch


Hardware

ment-manufactured killing machine that was created as part of a forgotten Emergency Population Control Bill. The self-sustaining machine's torso even comes equipped with an arsenal of death tools – saws, drills, knives and syringes filled with a toxic hallucinogen. Over the course of an evening, the M.A.R.K. 13 rebuilds itself and wages a bloody war against everyone in sight. To make the ride even wilder, there are cameos from Iggy Pop, Fields of the Nephilim frontman Carl McCoy and Lemmy from Motörhead.

An extraordinary post-apocalyptic sci-fi/horror adrenaline blast that is at once a throwback to beloved homicidal robot thrillers, while also being an emotionally riveting, politically charged cyberpunk death trip, *Hardware* is unlike anything you've ever seen before. Darkly witty and poetic, it's bursting with violence, breathtaking visuals and originality. **MITCH DAVIS**

THE HAUNTING OF JULIA

1977/CANADA/UK/98 MIN
STARRING MIA FARROW, TOM CONTI AND KEIR DULLEA
DIRECTED BY RICHARD LONCRAINE

It's best known under its American name, *The Haunting of Julia*, but its original title, *Full Circle*, is arguably more fitting for this subtle and sophisticated tale of a woman whose best efforts to cope with her traumatic past pull her into another horror story – one that pushes her to the brink of madness. Based on the novel by acclaimed horror scribe Peter Straub, *The Haunting of Julia* is a chilling ghost story that explores a darker side of motherhood and the boundaries of unconditional love.

Two months after the harrowing death of her daughter, Julia Lotting (Mia Farrow) is looking to start over. She finds herself a lovely new home but when she cuts her finger on her daughter's old toy, she stirs the malevolent ghost of a little girl who lived in the house before her, whose history with her own mother is oddly similar to Julia's recent ordeal. The haunting begins with strange sounds and apparitions, but eventually culminates in the sudden and seemingly accidental deaths of everyone Julia comes into contact with. It seems the house has a bloodlust motivated by vengeance, and Julia is determined to lay the spirits of both little girls to rest at whatever cost.

In addition to the actual haunting, Julia must also deal with her jilted and possessive ex-husband, lecherous men aplenty and well-meaning friends who all seem to know what's best for her. Farrow's flawless portrayal as the fiercely independent character fleshes out a distinctively strong and emphatic female character, who's working through her own demons – as well as the one inhabiting her house – while never once doubting herself or her sanity. Her strong female lead compliments this quietly eerie and reserved film that remains tragically unrecognized for its charm and chills. **ANAAEA SUBISSATI**

The Haunting of Julia

Hell's Ground

HELL'S GROUND

2007/PAKISTAN/77 MIN
STARRING KUNWAR ALI ROSHAN
ROOSHANIE EJAZ AND RUBYA CHAUDHRY
DIRECTED BY OMAR KHAN

For many Western audiences, the shrill singing and choreographed dance numbers that often define the cinema of Bollywood – and Lollywood, its Pakistani equivalent – have painted the region as a suitably "exotic" setting far removed from the rest of the world. Omar Ali Khan's debut feature *Hell's Ground* (or *Zibahkhana* – an Urdu-language term that literally translates to "slaughterhouse") is a fascinating and gory Pakistani fright feature that rejects over-stylized South Asian film gloss for a grittier, and more tactile, vision of the country.

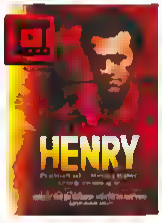
Filmed in and around the city of Islamabad, *Hell's Ground* begins as five teens, OJ (Osman Khalid Butt), Roxy (Rubya Chaudhry), Ayesha (Rooshanie Ejaz), Simon (Haider Reza) and Vicky (Kunwar Ali Roshan), blow off school to attend an out-of-town concert. Piling into a brightly painted van, they travel through the backroads, stopping at a roadside food stand where the eccentric owner delivers an ominous message and advises them to turn back, they are trespassing on "Hell's Ground." Ignoring the warning, the teens head deeper into the woods and suddenly find themselves stalked by an army of bloodthirsty zombies who have been infected by contaminated drinking water. The travellers escape, but after their van breaks down, they discover there's something even more deadly than the hordes of stumbling undead – they are lost in the lair of a mysterious, burqa-clad killer who dishes out carnage and pain with a deadly spiked mace, among other nasty implements of death.

Hell's Ground is a marvel that makes exceptional use of its setting to add a fresh spin to the well-worn slasher formula. It also offers a regionally specific view of the country that few Western audiences have seen before, touching on pressing regional environmental issues and offering a glimpse into the daily routines of Pakistan's pop culture-savvy youth. Watch it and you'll see many of your favourite horror tropes again for the first time.

PAUL CORUPE

HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER

1986/USA/83 MIN
STARRING MICHAEL ROOKER, TRACY ARNOLD AND TOM TOWLES
DIRECTED BY JOHN MCNAUGHTON



In the mid-'80s, when the serial killer genre had devolved into slasher mindlessness, the debut of a neophyte director reversed the trend by raising the bar on graphic violence and forcing viewers to account for it in its most raw form. *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* was John McNaughton's journey into one man's heart of darkness.

The story is based loosely on one of America's most infamous rapist/murderers, Henry Lee Lucas, and his

The Hidden

sometime accomplice Otis Toole, transplanting them to a downbeat Midwestern setting as they go on a killing spree. It's the antithesis of the typical slasher films and gooty horror comedies popular at the time. Employing the techniques of a documentary and occasional hand-held video footage, *Henry* comes across as almost unbearably inhuman, an unforgettable study of a true monster of the modern world.

Adding to its grubby allure, McNaughton crafted an eerie, disconcerting soundtrack and added a soundscape that fleshes out the few atrocities that mercifully happen off camera. And yet, despite the fact that *Henry* once anticipated a grim new turn for the genre, it is far from an exercise in obscenity, rather, it's a mute and all-too sobering look at the week in the life of an urban prowler.

THE GORE MET

THE HIDDEN

1987/USA/96 MIN
STARRING KYLE MACLACHLAN, MICHAEL NOURI AND CLAUDIA CHRISTIAN
DIRECTED BY JACK SHOLDER

This late-'80s sci-fi/horror semi-classic boasts one of the most nihilistic movie villains of all time: a parasitic alien creature that can jump from human to human with no regard for the physical sanctity of its host. Its agenda is simple: wreak as much hell and havoc on Earth as possible by turning ordinary, law abiding citizens into kill-crazy maniacs until their bodies are so decimated, it's forced to jump to a new host, which it does in a rather disgusting fashion by dragging its slimy, tentacled torm from one mouth into another.

In hot pursuit is FBI agent Lloyd Gallagher (Kyle MacLachlan). He joins forces with exasperated detective Tom Beck (Michael Nouri), who has a difficult time grasping the concept of the creature.

Director Jack Sholder (*A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge*) wastes little time when it comes to exploiting the anarchic potential of the psychotic slug's ultra-violent tendencies. The opening car chase alone is pure cathartic ecstasy. In the days before *Grand Theft Auto*, this was about the most chaotic joyride you were likely to see on your TV screen. What follows is one car-crunching, body-smashing scenario after another, that pauses only to dabble in the stereotypical but engaging buddy-cop relationship between Gallagher and Beck.

One of the more memorable sequences sees the space slug invading the body of a curvy stripper (Claudia Christian). As it turns out, the little beastie is a randy bugger, so finding itself inside a bodacious beauty like Ms. Christian, it can't help but stare in the mirror whilst fondling the goods. But much to the extreme chagrin of mesmerized teenage boys all over the pervosphere, the critter never unwraps those voluptuous assets! Maybe it was a ratings issue? Who knows? But it's the one timid moment in an otherwise balls-to-the-wall, bullet-riddled onslaught of bone-crunching bliss. STUART F. ANDREWS

A HORRIBLE WAY TO DIE

2010/USA/90 MIN
STARRING A J BOWEN AMY SEIMETZ
AND JOE SWANBERG
DIRECTED BY ADAM WINGARD

Come for the excellent title, stay for a different style of horror movie. Director Adam Wingard refers to his film as "mumblecore," a cinema verité movement that, according to him, typifies movies that present "a gritty and more stylistically realistic take on characters than a normal, conventional approach would."

Written by Simon Barrett (*Dead Birds*), *A Horrible Way to Die* features A J Bowen (*The House of the Devil*) as Garrick Turrell, a notorious mass murderer with a rabid following who has recently escaped from prison. The subject of a manhunt, Turrell sets out to track down his former girlfriend, Sarah (Amy Seimetz, *Bitter Feast*), who put him behind bars. Now a recovering alcoholic, Sarah attends AA meetings as she quietly laments being duped by Turrell's affable charms while they were together. There, she meets Kevin (Joe Swanberg), a fellow addict who proves to be a romantic distraction from her haunted past. But her past has caught up to her.

The mumblecore aesthetic in *AHWtD* is exemplified by scenes that fade in and out of one another, handheld camerawork that frequently roams uncomfortably close to the actors' faces, and occasionally the fuzzy glow of out-of-focus Christmas lights float as if superimposed atop of the film's most intimate sequences. The effect, which is further amplified by a dour score and a gloomy visual palette, is downright surreal. As Turrell crosses the dreary Midwest landscape, racking up grisly murders in his wake, it feels as if we are helplessly drifting through the story's smudgy timeline. An altogether different genre experience. TREVOR TUMINSKI

HORROR EXPRESS

1972/SPAIN,UK/90 MIN
STARRING CHRISTOPHER LEE PETER CUSHING
AND TELLY SAVALAS
DIRECTED BY EUGENIO MARTIN

From the late 1950s to the early '80s, genre icons Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing made nearly two dozen horror films together, appearing, for the most part, in projects for Hammer Films and Amicus Productions. In the early '70s, their work took them to Madrid, where they filmed the fantastically offbeat *Horror Express*.

Set in 1906, the film has Lee as Alexander Saxton, an

A Horrible Way to Die

HUMANOIDS FROM THE DEEP

1980/USA/80 MIN
STARRING DOUG MCCLURE, ANN TURKEL AND VIC MORROW
DIRECTED BY BARBARA PEETERS AND JIMMY T MURAKAMI

"We've worked in just about every genre over this period, and we keep coming back to horror and science fiction. They're perennial," says charming octagenarian Roger Corman, reflecting on a career in B-movies that began six decades ago. Corman, who spoke with *Rue Morgue* from his office in Los Angeles, continues to enjoy accolades, including a tribute at the Oscars back in 2009, and recent reissues of titles he produced, dating from his mid-career period in the 1970s and '80s. Among them, a certain gory creature feature, in which a northern California fishing hamlet is terrorized by sex-crazed sea monsters.

Humanoids From the Deep took the sexual themes of *The Creature From the Black Lagoon* (and hence *King Kong* before it) to their logical extreme: instead of the classic tragic monster doomed by falling in love with a human woman, audiences were now witnessing multiple creatures lurching out of the depths to rape every available female and gruesomely waste any male who got in the way.

"They were simply part of the script; it was an R-rated film," explains Corman of the film's particularly grim elements. "We've never done anything beyond an R. I don't think we even had any trouble with the ratings board. It's just a simple, straight R-rated film."

Nevertheless, the media backlash was swift, and the outcry from feminists and fundamentalists alike was particularly shrill. While admittedly more far-fetched, an additional subtext mined by some of the film's foes was the age-old white male battle cry, "They're after our women!" evoking charges of subtle racism.

The famously ironic footnote to the controversy is that *Humanoids* was directed by a woman, Barbara Peeters apparently had few qualms about depicting violence against men but shied away from graphically victimizing women, a problem that required extra footage to be shot.

Corman recalls, "I told her before we shot, 'Remember, Barbara, what happens is very simple: the humanoids rape the women and kill the men.' She said, 'Got it – rape the women and kill the men.' Well, she shot the killing of the men in such a bloodthirsty, violent way that we actually had to trim it down a little bit. But for the raping of the women she showed silhouettes and shadows on rocks. We had to have the assistant director go back out and shoot those things!"

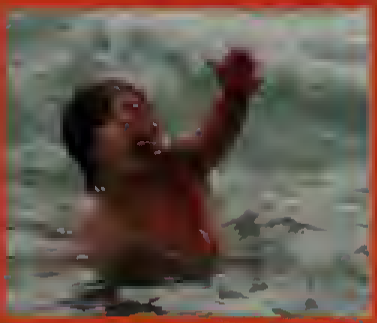
And how did the reshoots affect the producer-director relationship?

Corman laughs, "It didn't improve, I'll say that much."

Whether or not there was any merit to the hysteria, this much remains certain: *Humanoids*, while not particularly sophisticated, was nonetheless a horror film that understood its mission and worked very efficiently, qualities that earned it a healthy payday during its initial theatrical run and later saw it slowly build a huge cult following on home video.

"I'm not certain if the controversy had any effect [on the box office], but if it did, I think it helped because it sort of advertised the sensational aspects. It was a very successful film for us."

Humanoids from the Deep



Typically, *Humanoids'* before-they-were-famous factor is formidable. Peeters is hardly the most notable director on Corman's roster, but she subsequently enjoyed considerable success directing prime-time TV hits including *Remington Steele* and *Falcon Crest*. Uber-producer Gale Anne Hurd (*Alien* and *Terminator* series) was a production assistant, the fantastically evocative music score was written by future Oscar-winner James Horner (*Aliens*, *48 Hours* and – try not to hold it against him – *Titanic*) and then-20-year-old effects prodigy Rob Bottin (*Piranha*, *The Fog*, *The Thing*, *Se7en*) designed the monsters. Linda Shayne, who makes a brief (and eventually topless) appearance as a local beauty queen during the film's climactic sequence, would later become an acclaimed director of children's films.

Today, *Humanoids* may owe its enduring infamy to an aquatic theme grounded in genetic engineering gone awry.

"We were aware of the controversy – which still exists today – over genetic engineering, and we just used it as what passes for a logical explanation," says Corman. "My theory is the audience wants to see the creature and you've got to give them some sort of explanation. It need not be detailed or totally believable, but it should be close enough to reality that the audience, as the old phrase goes, can willingly suspend their disbelief. The audience goes along with it because they went to see the picture."

JOHN W BOWEN

Horror Express

English anthropologist travelling by train from Shanghai to Moscow with the frozen remains of a large, hairy being that he discovered while on an expedition in Northeast China. Believing it may be of scientific importance, he has the creature placed in storage in a large, secured wooden crate. But when a prying former acquaintance, Dr Wells (Cushing), bribes a baggage handler into opening the padlocked box to inspect what's inside, the creature – now thawed out and sporting glowing red eyes – breaks free and goes on a killing spree.

An unconventional mix of gothic horror, detective story and even science-fiction, *Horror Express* comes across almost like a Victorian-era *The Thing*. Also starring a scenery-chewing Telly Savalas as Captain Kazan, a bombastic yet deadly Cossack, it features an awesome score by composer John Cacavas (*The Satanic Rites of Dracula*), several bizarre deaths and a mad, Rasputin-like monk who denounces God in order to pledge allegiance to Satan. In what other film could you get all this? JAMES RURRELL

HOUSE

1977/JAPAN/88 MIN
STARRING KIMIKO IKEGAMI, MIKI JINBO AND KUMIKO OHBA
DIRECTED BY NOBUHIKO OBAYASHI

The story goes that director Nobuhiko Obayashi was hired to develop a script similar to *Jaws*, but with a house instead of a shark. The resulting psychedelic acid trip of a movie misses that mark completely, but in the best way possible.

It's summer holiday and a group of high-school girlfriends, each named for their trademark trait ("Fantasy," "Melody," "Prof," etc.), are planning a trip through the Japanese countryside to visit Angel's (Kimiko Ikegami) estranged aunt (Yoko Minamida). Auntie is suspiciously well-preserved despite her many years alone in the family mansion, and becomes even more youthful and energetic as the young girls start disappearing. Trapped in a cosmic funhouse that picks them off one by one, the girls await rescue from their schoolteacher Mr Togo

House, House of the Devil

(Kiyohiko Ozaki), whom they've curiously invited along, but the house and its mistress only have an appetite for young, unwed women.

The film leaves nothing to the imagination, and by that I mean no imagination can compare with the surreal and bizarre universe this movie inhabits. Completely unfettered by cinematic convention, *House* is relentless in its use of jarring cuts and wipes, inexplicable changes in the musical score and some of the most bizarre and hilarious kill scenes ever committed to celluloid.

What's most surprising is that it works: once you get past the expectation of movie orthodoxy and give yourself over to the schizophrenic hysteria, there are plenty of laughs to be had as paintings projectile-vomit, people are turned into bananas and a severed head takes a bite out of an unsuspecting schoolgirl's rear end. You've been warned! **ANDREA SURISSATI**

THE HOUSE OF THE DEVIL

2009/USA/95 MIN
STARING JOCELIN DONAHUE, TOM NOONAN AND MARY WORONOV
DIRECTED BY TI WEST

Remember psychological horror? Not the soggy, long-haired ghost girls and bug-eyed little kids the Japanese deluged us with, but real psychological horror. The plotlines of *The Innocents*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*, *The Shining* and *The Changeling* are pretty diverse, but the chills are deep and downright traumatic. Whether or not *The House of the Devil* signals a return of the tendency on any scale, this chiller does serve notice that writer/director Ti West doesn't just remember psychological horror, he's also well on his way to becoming a master of it.

Newcomer Jocelin Donahue (*The Burrowers*) plays Samantha, a university student who accepts a mysterious babysitting job at a rambling house out in the sticks. Upon arrival, her shifty employers, the Ulmans (*The Monster Squad*'s Tom Noonan and cult flick queen Mary Woronov, both wonderfully skeezy), reluctantly admit that her charge for the evening is actually an elderly mother, secluded in her upstairs bedroom. Samantha's understandably ready to bolt, but the Ulmans – who simply have to get out for tonight's solar eclipse – up the ante until the cash-strapped heroine relents. They split, things start going bump in the night and our girl realizes that the couple (and maybe the mysterious Mother Ulman herself) have plans for her.

West's touch is so deft, and the tension so palpable, that most of the time we're only dimly aware that we've seen this all before. Donahue, who's front and centre and alone for the bulk of the picture, turns in a vivid perform-

ance, and, in a fashion that recalls *Session 9*, the film's slow build is capped off by an unexpectedly bloody climax. Whether or not setting the film in the early 1980s was necessary is debatable, but the important thing is that West pulls it off without getting self-consciously retro. JOHN W BOWEN

HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL

1959/USA/75 MIN
STARRING VINCENT PRICE, CAROL OHMART AND RICHARD LONG
DIRECTED BY WILLIAM CASTLE

Unlike the elegantly mounted Poe adaptations helmed by Roger Corman that Vincent Price starred in during the 1960s, the films Price did for director/producer William Castle in the late 1950s were the cinematic equivalent to a funhouse ride. A first-rate showman and promoter, Castle released his thrillers complete with carnival-like gimmickry, including rigged theatre seats to give audiences small electrical shocks for the 1959 flick *The Tingler*. For *House on Haunted Hill*, released earlier that year, Castle created "Emergo" – a plastic skeleton suspended on wires that swooped above audiences during screenings.

The plot sees millionaire Fredrick Loren (Price) and his fourth wife Annabelle (Carol Ohmart) inviting five strangers to their home for a "haunted house" party, along with the promise that whoever can stay in the place for one night will receive $10,000. The catch: anyone who decides to stay will be locked inside without electricity or means of escape – along with several marauding, murderous ghosts. Soon, the guests must contend with disembodied heads, organs that play by themselves, decrepit spectres and, of course, their sinister host.

Brimming with delicious black humour, it's a highly entertaining film. Price is in top form and the snappy script has him deliver some truly great lines, including this one to Ohmart: "Do you remember the fun we had when you poisoned me?"

It's a movie that's been in the public domain for a long time, but look for Johnny Legend's 50th anniversary Raunchy Tonk imprint version, which looks and sounds better than ever. JAMES BURRELL

I SAW THE DEVIL

2010/SOUTH KOREA/141 MIN
STARRING MIN SIK CHOI, BYUNG HUN LEE AND GOOK HWAN JEON
DIRECTED BY JEE-WOON KIM

Over the last decade South Korea has become known for stylish and intense genre films, notably Chan-wook Park's *Oldboy* and Joon-ho Bong's *The Host*. While some have pushed the boundaries of acceptable content in the country's conservative film

House on Haunted Hill

I Saw the Devil

industry, none have caused as much controversy as Ji-woon Kim's *I Saw the Devil*.

Featuring two of the nation's biggest stars, Min-sik Choi (*Oldboy*) and Byung-hun Lee, it revolves around a government special agent Soo-hyun (Lee) whose fiancée is kidnapped by hammer-wielding serial killer Kyung-chul (Choi), who rapes and dismembers her, flushing the parts down a sewer pipe. After police discover her remains, Soo-hyun mounts his own investigation outside the law. After terrorizing potential suspects, he tracks down Kyung-chul – a school bus driver! – and begins stalking him. Before the monster can rape and murder his next victim, Soo-hyun beats him within an inch of his life and then... disappears.

He plants a tracking device in the killer and decides to toy with him, stepping in every time Kyung-chul's about to victimize someone to lay a savage beating on him. This process continues with the agent uncovering a house of horrors run by Kyung-chul's cannibal friends. But he underestimates his resourceful foe and soon the tables are turned.

I Saw the Devil contains both shocking bloodshed and exceptional technical craft, including a now famous knife fight that takes place in a cab as it spins out of control. The movie has style to burn, and, in the tradition of films such as *Taxi Driver* and *Unforgiven*, it pointedly explores (often at the end of a blade) the relationship between heroism, violence and our viewing pleasure of both. No wonder the government censored it so heavily. Luckily, you can get this heady bloodbath uncut in North America.

PHIL BROWN

I SELL THE DEAD

2008/USA/85 MIN
STARRING DOMINIC MONAGHAN, RON PERLMAN AND LARRY FESSENDEN
DIRECTED BY GLENN MCQUAID

Infamous 19th-century serial killers Burke and Hare, who sold the corpses of their victims to an Edinburgh anatomist, have long been pop-culture fodder, popping up in places as unexpected as *The Munsters* and *Dr Who*. By far, though, the most entertaining take on the tale is *I Sell the Dead*, a Dickensian horror-comedy from New York City's Glass Eye Pix.

If you want to split, erm, Hares, the grave-robbing antiheroes of Glenn McQuaid's debut feature aren't the murderous duo themselves, but a pair of body-snatchers who are giving them a run for their money. There's a big difference, though. Arthur (Dominic Monaghan) and Willie (Larry Fessenden) have no qualms about stealing cadavers for the sinister Dr Quint (Angus Scrimm), but they draw the line at killing people.

At least, that's Arthur's story, and he's sticking to it. When the film opens, the two have been arrested for grave-robbing and murder. Willie, in fact, has already had his run-in with the guillotine. Arthur is left to assert their relative innocence to Father Duffy (Ron Perlman), who seems just a little too interested in the pair's encounters with the House of Murphy, a family of rival corpse-ped-

diers headed up by a famously sadistic patriarch Arthur spins a strange and hilarious tale of his adventures with Willie, which take a turn for the strange(r) when they realize that vampires, zombies and aliens fetch a better price than run-of-the-mill stiffs

Horror comedies often end up as bland affairs that offer neither laughs nor shocks, but McQuaid and company succeed at both ends of the spectrum by shovelling up a nonstop barrage of bizarre twists, gruesome sight gags, gallows humour and even a few scares, all coated in a convincing patina of 19th-century grime

APRIL SNELLINGS

I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE

1943/USA/69 MIN
STARRING JAMES ELLISON, FRANCES DEE AND TOM CONWAY
DIRECTED BY JACQUES TOURNEUR

Producer Val Lewton and director Jacques Tourneur followed up the box office success of 1942's *Cat People* with this ominous concoction of voodoo and ... Jane Eyre?

After reading a magazine article on voodoo, Lewton decided to make a film on the subject but needed a plot. So he asked his screenwriting team, which included Curt Siodmak (whose credits already included *The Wolf Man*, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* and two *Invisible Man* sequels for Universal), to use the Charlotte Brontë novel as the model.

The result sees Canadian nurse Betsy Connell (Frances Dee) take a job in the West Indies caring for Jessica (Christine Gordon), the catatonic wife of a depressed sugar plantation owner (Tom Conway). With the help of a local witch doctor, Betsy tries to determine if the cause of Jessica's zombie-like state is a rare tropical disease or a dose of black magic. As she begins to fall in love with her employer, Betsy discovers that his drunken half-brother had planned to run away with Jessica, which resulted in a voodoo curse they must now contend with.

Zombie's smart but lean plot is trumped by its intoxicating atmosphere ripe with island mysticism, as Tourneur again proves his skill with dynamic composition, making economical, but shockingly effective use of light and shadow and a few evocative voodoo trinkets.

PAUL CORUPE

ICHI THE KILLER

2001/JAPAN/129 MIN
STARRING TADANOBU ASANO, NAO OHMORI AND SHINYA TSUKAMOTO
DIRECTED BY TAKASHI MIIKE

Two-thirds of the way into *Ichi the Killer*, one corrupt police detective says to his corrupt police detective twin brother, "Most people have a touch of both sadism and masochism inside them, but this ichi is 100 percent pure sadist." It's not an accurate description of the character, but it sure is a succinct summation of the film.

Jijii (Shin'ya Tsukamoto) tries to foment a war between rival yakuza gangs by manipulating a simpering and hopelessly brainwashed karate expert in a superhero suit into assassinating the head of one of the gangs. Jijii then cleans up the crime scene to appear as if nothing happened. The rest of the syndicate leaders assume that the boss absconded with the gang's money, but their sadomasochistic enforcer, Kakihara (Tadanobu Sato), believes their boss was kidnapped by a rival gang leader and mercilessly tortures him with skewers and hot oil. He's expelled from the syndicate as a result of this sadism and his fellow gang members leave with him. Through torturing a prostitute, Kakihara then learns that Ichi killed the boss, and prepares for a really violent showdown with the mad-dog killer.

This is a film that defines adjectives like "over-the-top" and "goretest," and cannily presages the torture porn trend. It's an obtuse, ultra violent, subversive and hilariously perverse mash-up of the gangster, slasher and superhero genres that is both deeper than and

10 FOREIGN ZOMBIE FILMS YOU NEED TO SEE

BY TAL ZIMERMAN

The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue

BURIAL GROUND

1981/ITALY/85 MIN

Despite the endless and obvious flaws spanning the film's 85 minute runtime, *Burial Ground* possesses a seedy, filthy charm that even the gnarliest Italian zombie flicks couldn't hope to attain. There's an ancient prophecy that wakes the dead, a house full of horny thrill-seekers, and then there's ten-year-old Michael who is played by a small adult. Why didn't director Andrea Bianchi hire a child actor? Because having a child chew his mom's tit off on-camera would have clearly been in poor taste. *Burial Ground* has everything a zombie fan could ask for, and lots that no sane person would.

DEAD ALIVE

1992 NEW ZEALAND/104 MIN

Before his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy reinvented the fantasy epic, taking home eleven Oscars, Peter Jackson gave the world the outrageously gory zombie opus *Dead Alive* (a.k.a. *Braindead*). The plot concerns Lionel, a mama's boy whose overbearing mother contracts a virus from a Sumatran rat monkey, turning her into a pus-oozing ghoul. As guests come to their home, they too fall victim to the disease and our hero tries to contain the horde within the property. After Lionel's uncle throws a party, all hell breaks loose, culminating in a finale featuring several zombies and one pissed-off Kiwi with a lawn mower.

HELL'S GROUND

2007 PAKISTAN/77 MIN

South Asia's enormous film market is known for a lot of things, but zombie movies ain't one of them. Touted as Pakistan's first gore film, *Hell's Ground* is an exotic feast for the eyes, combining elements of EC Comics, backwoods cannibal killers and, of course, flesh-eating zombies. Writer/director Omar Khan even tapped old-school exploitation artist Mohsin Reza for a series of posters for the film's release, and included a cameo role by Rehan, the lead in Lollywood's 1967 take on *Dracula*. *Hell's Ground* is so much fun, you won't even notice the absence of dance numbers.

JUAN OF THE DEAD

2011 CUBA/92 MIN

Like its UK inspiration *Shaun of the Dead*, Cuban zombie flick *Juan of the Dead* falls more into satirical comedy territory than horror, but still has loads of bite. In it, lazy manchild Juan (Alexis Dias Villegas) and his idiotic pack of losers make the most of the living dead uprising by offering their services as zombie exterminators. The sharp indictment of Cuban authorities' message of good news in the face of disaster, most pronounced in the ever-shifting media reports, give *Juan* its weight, and Villegas' turn as the lead is hilarious, but it's the plentiful splatter gags that steal the show.

LIVING DEAD AT MANCHESTER MORGUE

1974 ITALY/SPAIN/95 MIN

A few years before George A. Romero's epic splatterfest *Dawn of the Dead* changed the course of zombie films forever, Jorge Grau's Italian/Spanish co-production *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* had audiences losing their lunches. Blending motifs of environmental catastrophe, cops-vs-hippies' class warfare and the occult, *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* also marks frequent Fulci collaborator Gianetto De Rossi's first of many forays into the world of gutmunching, flesh-ripping zombies. Ray Lovelock's freewheeling bad boy trading barbs with Arthur Kennedy's pig-headed detective, the still-shock-

ing nurse assault sequence, and the film's chilling atmosphere make this creeper essential viewing

THE PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES

1966/UK/91 MIN

Set in the 1800s, *Plague of the Zombies* is a decidedly old-school affair that relies more on atmosphere than guts 'n' gore, and hearkens back to the undead's origins as slaves of a diabolical master. Here, the recently deceased are returning to life in rural England, giving way to an investigation that finds a local villager responsible for using voodoo rituals to create a creepy congregation of ghouls that engage in various acts of murder and mayhem. *Plague* is the perfect bridge between the Lugosi-era zombie shockers, and the Romero-influenced films that arrived in the wake of *Night of the Living Dead*.

THEY CAME BACK

2004/FRANCE/102 MIN

For *They Came Back*, director Robin Campillo eschews the usual zombie mayhem, but cranks the social commentary to impressive levels. These undead aren't rotten ghouls, but rather spaced-out individuals who exist as they once were. Also gone is the cannibalism and the virus-like quality associated with the subgenre. Here, the "zombies" are treated more like refugees, housed in temporary camps before they apathetically lumber back to their old jobs and relationships. The third act offers some action, but *They Came Back* is mostly a sombre, meditative look at what might should millions of dead folks return to the land of the living.

TOKYO ZOMBIE

2005/JAPAN/103 MIN

Based on a popular manga from 1999, *Tokyo Zombie* is the story of Fujio and Mitsuo, two numbskulls who are too distracted by dreams of becoming martial arts superstars to properly tend to their jobs at the fire extinguisher factory. So irate is their boss that he dies of a heart attack, and his body is dumped in a toxic river. Naturally, the bossman and several others rise from the gloop, giving way to the requisite zombie mayhem. At *Tokyo Zombie*'s heart lies the juxtaposition of Fujio's deadpan apathy with Mitsuo's bug-eyed mania. It's as clever as it is funny.

Dead Alive, Versus

VERSUS

2000/JAPAN/119 MIN

Zombies versus Japanese yakuza gangsters in a forest containing a portal to Hell – if that phrase entices you in any capacity, then Ryûhei Kitamura's feature-length debut *Versus* needs be on your DVD shelf. When Prisoner KSC2-303 is brought into the woods to face execution at the hands of ruthless mobsters, dead yakuza begin to rise from their shallow graves giving way to an ultra-violent brawl that never lets up until the film's final frames. Splitting the difference between classic martial arts movies and Raimi-esque splatstick sensibilities, *Versus* is as fast-paced and absurd as you need it to be, and then some.

ZOMBIE HOLOCAUST

1980/ITALY/84 MIN

Originally released stateside as *Dr. Butcher MD*, *Zombie Holocaust* combines the best of the Italian zombie and cannibal cycles into one messy, though endlessly entertaining stew of gore gags, goofy plot twists, and a killer performance by Donald O'Brien as the doctor. After arriving on an island off the coast of Indonesia in search of cannibals, Dr. Peter Chandler and his team discover something far more gruesome: a mad doctor who has been experimenting on locals and has found a way to bring them back to life after they die. Bonus: *Zombie Holocaust* boasts the greatest boat-propeller-facial ever put to film.

Ichi the Killer

more facile than those descriptors may imply, made by a director who, when he decided he wanted to have the title rise out of a ridiculously large puddle of Ichi's semen, used real male cum to accomplish that. An adaptation of a Japanese manga of the same title, it features absurdly cartoonish violence and gore that will leave even the most hardened gorehound gagging.

THE GORE MET

ILSA, SHE WOLF OF THE SS

1975/USA/96 MIN
STARRING DYANNE THORNE, GREGORY KNOPH AND RICHARD KENNEDY
DIRECTED BY DON EDMONDS

Stuffed with sadism, gore, rape, violence and any other hateful qualities you can think of, *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* is one of the most gleefully notorious camp classics ever to whip its way to the big screen. Featuring Dyanne Thorne in a towering performance as the nastiest Nazi bitch you never wanted to meet, Ilsa reigned supreme over four equally offensive movies in the 1970s, but it all started here in this inventive tale of torture and unethical experimentation that took the Nazisploitation trend to a level of unprecedented excess.

Based loosely on the story of Ilse Koch, the notoriously cruel wife of a Nazi concentration camp commandant, Ilsa and her fascist followers perform agonizing medical tests on prisoners, including those she takes with her to bed each evening. But when an American named Wolfe (Gregory Knoph) with unusual sexual stamina arrives in her camp, she's unable to help herself from falling under his spell – a moment of weakness that allows the remaining inmates to stage a bloody revolt to topple the Third Reich just as the unsavoury General (Richard Kennedy) arrives for an inspection. Featuring castrations, gratuitous whipping, electrified sex toys, flesh-eating maggots and a George "Buck" Flower cameo, this co-production between *Blood Feast* producer David F. Friedman and the Montreal schlockmeisters at Cinepix may be uncomfortably offensive, but it's still imbued with a tongue-in-cheek slyness that makes it as fun to watch today as when Ilsa ruled over the grindhouses and drive-ins of the 1970s with a leather-clad fist. PAUL GOHUPE

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN

1957/USA/81 MIN
STARRING GRANT WILLIAMS, RANDY STUART AND PAUL LANGTON
DIRECTED BY JACK ARNOLD

This tortured tale of alienation and emasculation with an isolated man fighting overwhelming odds is one of the most thought-provoking and nail-biting sci-fi horrors in the history of the cross-genre. Written by horror icon Richard Matheson (*I Am Legend*) and directed by Jack Arnold (*Tarantula*), it stars Grant Williams as Scott Carey, a successful businessman happily married to his beautiful wife, Louise (Randy Stuart.) One lazy afternoon on

Incubus

a pleasure cruise, he passes through a mysterious radioactive cloud that hovers over the water (gotta love those 1950s-style mysterious radioactive clouds!). As the weeks progress, he discovers he's losing weight and worries that he's losing height as well. When x-rays confirms his suspicions, Carey is sent to a special research facility where it's determined that for some scientifically unknown reason (gotta love those 1950s-style scientifically unknown reasons!), there's been a reversal of the growth process. As specialists scramble to concoct an antidote, Carey begins to shrink.

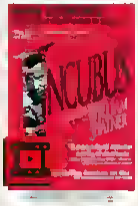
These early passages are tragic and bleak, steeped in an unremitting body horror. A particularly heartbreaking moment has the diminished Carey, no bigger than a child by this point, confess to us (via voiceover) how unbearable it is to sexually desire his wife but not be able to do anything about it.

As the condition worsens, he finds himself a miniature mockery of what he once was, abandoned in a world of giants where even his once loving pet cat is now a dangerous foe. Giving up on any hope for a cure, he reclaims a sense of identity and purpose by engaging his primal survival instincts (a recurring theme in much of Matheson's work). This sets up one of the film's most iconic moments – the epic battle with a giant spider. It's also one of the film's most incredible special effects sequences, and holds up well even by today's standards. The inevitable ending is one of the most haunting conclusions in film history. It's mournful and devastating but strangely hopeful in a purely philosophical context, if not a physical one.

STUART F. ANDREWS

INCUBUS

1965/USA/78 MIN
STARRING WILLIAM SHATNER, ALLYSON AMES AND MILOS MILOS
DIRECTED BY LESLIE STEVENS



The forefather of the "cursed" film is unquestionably Leslie Stevens' *Incubus* (1965), which is known more for the legend surrounding it than the film itself. Made independently through Stevens' Daystar production company, it stars a pre-*Trek* Will Shatner as Marc, a wounded, pure-hearted soldier who returns to his country home only to face temptation from a beautiful female succubus hell-bent on stealing his soul. Despite receiving positive reviews at European film festivals, the movie was never released theatrically because it was deemed too difficult to market.

Subsequently, Daystar went bankrupt, and Stevens was divorced from *Incubus*' female lead Allyson Ames. Then Milos Milos, who played the title creature, committed murder-suicide, co-star Ann Atmar killed herself, co-star Eloise Hardt's daughter was kidnapped and murdered, and the original negative (plus almost all copies of the movie), were accidentally destroyed at a French lab. The film didn't surface again for nearly 35 years when a single, well-worn print was discovered at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris. This legacy of misfortune, however, usually overshadows what really makes the movie fascinating.

Incubus is a bastard genre hybrid, one of those rare films that questions the boundaries separating art house and exploitation cinema. It's often compared to Ingmar Bergman's classic *The Seventh Seal* due to its stark and layered black and white outdoor photography and Scandinavian-looking costumes and actors. Stevens married the poetic visuals to the lyrical, artificial language of Esperanto, which he chose in order to lend the film an otherworldly, fairy tale feel (yet utterly demonic). Nevertheless, the movie is destined never to court the mainstream audience of an *Amityville*, *Exorcist* or *Poltergeist*. When it comes to horror films, defiant mutants like *Incubus* speak volumes about the nature of the beast.

DAVE ALEXANDER

THE INNOCENTS

1961/USA/100 MIN
STARRING DEBORAH KERR, MARTIN STEPHENS AND PAMELA FRANKLIN
DIRECTED BY JACK CLAYTON

Classic literary works have been the foundation of horror cinema, but while audiences have seen countless adaptations of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* mounted since the silent era, Henry James' equally influential spectral thriller, *The Turn of the Screw* (1897), didn't glide on screen until 1961. This authoritative adaptation by British director Jack Clayton, released as *The Innocents*, is an astonishing entry in the Victorian-period ghost story canon.

Do ghosts really haunt the Bly estate, or is it all just the product of an overactive imagination? That's what inexperienced governess Miss Giddens (Deborah Kerr) wants to know after she's hired to care for orphaned siblings Miles (Martin Stephens) and Flora (Pamela Franklin). Arriving at the family's palatial country manor, Giddens is immediately taken aback by shadowy figures that continually appear around the manor, although the children reticently deny ever seeing them.

After housekeeper Mrs. Grose (Megs Jenkins) reveals that the previous governess drowned herself after her lover was killed in an accident on the grounds, Giddens becomes convinced that the amorous pair's spirits have returned to take over the souls of the children.

Originally advertised as "a new, adult motion picture experience," *The Innocents* brilliantly exploits the underlying ambiguities of James' original story with extremely disturbing results. Much of its ability to work as a spookhouse thriller depends on the viewer empathizing with Giddens' almost hysterical fear, and seasoned British stage actress Kerr is captivating as she walks a fine line between madness and rationality, a mass of shattered nerves. As the two not-so-innocent children, both Stephens and Franklin are also unexpectedly good, especially Stephens, who had starred a year earlier in *Village of the Damned*.

An exceptionally daring twist on the sex and death underpinnings popularized by Val Lewton's 1940s chillers, *The Innocents* is easily one of the most effective highbrow horror films of the 1960s, with an ingenious script

The Innocents

that works as both a chilling ghost story and a disturbing tale of sexual deviancy **PAUL CORUPE**

INVISIBLE AGENT

1942/USA/81 MIN
STARRING JON HALL, ILONA MASSEY AND PETER LORRE
DIRECTED BY EDWIN L. MARIN

Universal created one if its most unique monster sequels in this late installment of the *Invisible Man* series that squeezed H.G. Wells' classic tale into the middle of World War II. In the film, based on a script by *The Wolf Man* scribe Curt Siodmak, grandson of the original Invisible Man Frank Griffin III (Jon Hall) is recruited by the Allied forces to parachute deep into Nazi territory to help the war effort. Using the secret serum left to him by his infamous relative, he and a female agent (Ilona Massey) outwit swarms of bumbling Germans at every turn, uncovering sinister plans to launch a devastating attack on New York City.

While many horror films of the 1940s and '50s personified fears of war and enemy infiltration as monsters and destruction-bent creatures, *Invisible Agent* is a refreshingly straight-forward Universal effort in which invisibility is used less as a way to illustrate social alienation than it is a way to smash unsuspecting enemies in the face when they're not looking. Featuring notable villainous turns by horror icons Sir Cedric Hardwicke and Peter Lorre as a sinister Japanese agent, it's a film that draws from the classic matinee serials as much as from Universal's other monster movies, effortlessly shifting between horror and many other genres, from fantasy sci-fi to spy thriller to film noir. And yet it's all grounded in the notable effects and typically handsome look of Universal's other horror films – shadowy outdoor sequences and scenes inside dark German buildings help retain the Gothic flavour of its forbearers. **PAUL CORUPE**

ISLAND OF DEATH

1977/GREECE/108 MIN
STARRING BOB BELLING, JANE RYALL AND GERARD GONALONS
DIRECTED BY NICO MASTORAKIS

Legend has it that director Nico Mastorakis caught a screening of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* at an open air theatre in Athens and was appalled by the violence but impressed by how much money it was raking in considering the measly budget. So he decided to make an even more perverse film for even less money, resulting in *Island of Death*.

Christopher (Bob Belling) and Celia (Jane Ryall) are an attractive, blonde, blue-eyed British couple who take off to Greece for a raping and killing spree disguised as a moral crusade against perversion. Their first act of transgression is to call Christopher's mother while having a romp in a phone booth. Then, when he wakes the following day with his morning wood but finds Celia too tired to relieve him, he does what any red-blooded British

Invisible Agent

tourist would do: shags a goat, then slices open its throat.

I probably had you at "shags a goat" but from here, *Island of Death* devolves into all manner of inappropriate business, including a lynching from the back of an airborne biplane and the beheading of a middle-aged nymphomaniac with a tractor shovel. It's a veritable Rubik's Cube of perversions that exploits as many offensive and tasteless (but tasty!), taboo-shattering scenarios as its 108 minutes will allow.

Essentially, you have a relatively square filmmaker plundering his own naïve notions of perversity for purely commercial reasons. So as grotesque and offensive as *Island of Death* is, there's a certain endearing charm to the proceedings. And Mastorakis' gambit paid off. The film made money and he went on to have a long filmmaking career working with the likes of Oliver Reed, George Kennedy, Tippi Hedren, Anthony Quinn and Kirstie Alley – although I doubt they ever screened *Island of Death* at any of those wrap parties! **STUART F ANDREWS**

ISLAND OF LOST SOULS

1932/USA/70 MIN
STARRING CHARLES LAUGHTON, RICHARD ARLEN AND BELA LUGOSI
DIRECTED BY ERLE C KENTON

Universal may have dominated horror in the 1930s with their monster epics, but viewers should not overlook rival Paramount's excellent pre-code potboiler *Island of Lost Souls*. It's the first adaptation of H G Wells' anti-vivisectionist novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, in which he railed against the immorality of animal experimentation by presenting hybrid animal-men as test subjects, but this is updated into a more usual play on the anxieties over evolutionary theory that dominated the horror films at the time.

Dr Moreau (Charles Laughton) rules over his tiny island inhabited by terrible, pitiful "manbeasts," creatures stuck somewhere between man and animal that he has cooked up in his lab, nicknamed the House of Pain by his creations. When castaway Edward Parker (Richard Arlen) arrives, Moreau first tries distraction by pairing him up with panther-woman Lota (Kathleen Burke). But as the deranged doc finds it increasingly difficult to keep Edward from leaving the island, the population of animal men, led by the Sayer of the Law (Bela Lugosi), have started developing their own plans for revenge.

Island of Lost Souls

Featuring Lugosi's most notable role outside of *Dracula*, and perhaps Laughton's finest performance ever, *Island of Lost Souls* is a lush, big budget adaptation with genuinely disturbing undertones that cemented the figure of the mad scientist in horror films, a terrifying figure who will kill anyone and anything if it will advance his own knowledge. But more than that, it's also a clear declaration of fears over the fuzzy line that separates man and woman from the beasts – after all, "are we not men?"

PAUL CORUPE

JACK BROOKS: MONSTER SLAYER

2007/CANADA/85 MIN
STARRING ROBERT ENGLUND, TREVOR MATTHEWS AND DANIEL KASH
DIRECTED BY JON KNAUTZ

Call it the little Canadian monster movie that could. The plot: as a young boy, Jack Brooks (Trevor Matthews) witnesses the slaughter of his parents and sister during a family camping trip by a ferocious troll. He's traumatized and grows up to be a plumber saddled with an uptight girlfriend (Rachel Skarsten) and some serious anger management issues. When his night-school science teacher (Robert Englund) is possessed by an ancient demon and transforms into a giant tentacle monster that turns his classmates into rampaging demons, Jack finds the perfect outlet for his pent-up rage.

Matthews delivers a hero performance of Bruce Campbell proportions. When the tentacles burst out of his professor's back and start attacking the class, Jack straps on his tool belt and wades into battle.

Jack Brooks successfully juggles legitimately scary scenes and goofy physical comedy, most of which is provided by Englund, who often steals the show. His transformation from a quirky but affable science teacher, to a raving glutton who constantly belches and occasionally projectile vomits, to a blubbery tentacle demon is a highlight of the film.

Despite its modest budget, the movie plays much bigger than its bankroll, due in part to its score (which composer Ryan Shore recorded with the 91-piece Slovak Radio Orchestra), but mainly because of the film's ambitious special effects. For the monsters, computer graphics

Jack Brooks: Monster Slayer

were eschewed in favour of practical makeups. It's the perfect paean to '80s horror-comedy splatter.

THE GORE-MET

JACOB'S LADDER

1990/USA/116 MIN
STARRING TIM ROBBINS, ELIZABETH PENA AND DANNY AIELLO
DIRECTED BY ADRIAN LYNE

Back in the 1980s, Bruce Joel Rubin's screenplay for *Jacob's Ladder* was considered one of the great unproduced works in Hollywood. Complex and challenging, it was championed as the script "no one dares film." However, as the decade of fluorescent leg-warmers passed into history, thankfully someone did.

Adrian Lyne, director of *Flashdance* and *Fatal Attraction*, was an unexpected choice to helm a theological horror film, but was intrigued by the story of Jacob Singer (Tim Robbins), a Vietnam vet haunted by flashbacks of a devastating attack on his platoon in 1971. Persecuted by half-glimpsed inhuman creatures, his reality collapses into a series of vivid and terrifying episodes where even his girlfriend, Jezebel (Elizabeth Peña), seems to be tormenting him. After the mysterious death of his war buddy, Paul (Pruitt Taylor Vince), Jacob reunites with members of his old unit and discovers that they are all suffering the same paranoid visions.

In continuing his rigorous exploration of death and the afterlife (which includes *Brainstorm*, *Deadly Friend*, *Ghost* and *My Life*), Rubin picks the bones of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and the seminal *Carnival of Souls* – as seen through the hellish, metaphysical prism of post-Vietnam angst. For his part, Lyne delivers one of the most harrowingly subjective fear-films ever made. With a few hideous hallucinatory flourishes, he captures the climate of a nightmare as deftly as anyone post-Polanski. (The sequence where Jacob is wheeled into a shadowy surgical chamber surrounded by malformed medical staff will live with you forever.)

Lyne has cited the disturbing works of Francis Bacon as the inspiration for the intrusive "shaking head" monstrosities, and his use of speedy cuts and subliminal imagery has proved influential (see the *Silent Hill* video games and movies for examples). His only misstep is the cloyingly sentimental ending, but after enduring this remorseless descent into hell, perhaps we deserve one.

MICHAEL DOYLE

KILL LIST

2011/UK/95 MIN
STARRING NEIL MASKELL, MICHAEL SMILEY AND MYANNA BURING
DIRECTED BY BEN WHEATLEY

There's been a buzz around British writer/director Ben Wheatley since his first film, the darkly comedic crime flick *Down Terrace*, hit the festival circuit in 2009, but it was his second feature, *Kill List*, that really wowed horror fans.

Kill List is so subtle in its attack you'd be forgiven for not realising it's a horror film until quite late in the game,

THE LEGEND OF BOGGY CREEK

1972/USA/90 MIN
STARRING WILLIE E SMITH, JOHN P NIXON AND VERN STIERMAN
DIRECTED BY CHARLES B PIERCE

For countless moviegoers and television viewers in the 1970s, *The Legend of Boggy Creek* was a truly frightening experience. Based on real-life reports of a hairy, ape-like creature said to haunt the boggy bottomlands of Southern Arkansas, the film managed to blur the lines between the real and sensational aspects of the case, resulting in copious childhood nightmares and huge box-office sales.

Boggy Creek was the directorial debut of the late Charles B. Pierce (*The Town That Dreaded Sundown*, *The Evictors*), who put aside a career in advertising to pursue filmmaking. Pierce was living in Texarkana, Arkansas, in the early 1970s and, like most the residents of the area, had been following sensational newspaper reports about a strange creature sighted near the small, rural town of Fouke. Known locally as the "Fouke Monster," the creature had been seen by several prominent locals and, in one case, allegedly attacked a family at their home. Pierce, wanting to capitalize on the frenzy, borrowed some money, got a camera and set out to make a movie based on the beast.

Boasting "A True Story" tagline and shot on location in Fouke, the movie has bragging rights for being one of the first horror films shot in a docudrama style. Whether intentional or not, the film's gritty, piecemeal production and first-person accounts impart a sense of realism that makes the incredible story seem all the more believable. This technique, common in horror films today, was way ahead of its time and is a major reason why this cult gem scared so many viewers during its lengthy run.

The Legend of Boggy Creek

Since *The Legend of Boggy Creek* is more or less a series of encounters with the Fouke Monster, it does not follow a typical format consisting of rehearsed dialogue. Instead, Pierce enlisted actual Fouke residents to recreate the reported incidents. Their eyewitness retellings, later overdubbed in unabashed Southern drawl, contribute to the overall authenticity. These people look and sound scared, as if Pierce had miraculously been there to film the encounters as they were actually happening. Because of this, it seems less like a movie and more like a horrifying live news broadcast.

Even though Pierce is no longer with us, his legacy lives on in the minds of those he frightened. Successful horror directors such as Eduardo Sánchez (*Lovely Molly*, *The Blair Witch Project*) proudly admit to being heavily influenced by *The Legend of Boggy Creek*. He and his co-director, Dan Myrick, followed Pierce's lead as they created the found-footage reality of the Blair Witch. Sanchez is now looking to pay the ultimate tribute to *Boggy Creek* with his upcoming film *Exists*, a Bigfoot-themed horror movie. *Rue Morgue* speaks to Sanchez regarding his love for Pierce's legendary film and the role it played in his craft.

Where and when did you first see* The Legend of Boggy Creek*?

I saw it when I was a kid on TV. Scared the living crap out of me and haunted me for months. I expected Bigfoot to come looking through my window at any moment! It pretty much scared everyone! It frightened me more than any other movie I had seen. Just the idea of this creature sharing my world blew my mind.

Is there a particular scene or sequence that really stands out to you?

The [illegible] Holy hell! Look for a major homage – or rip-off – to that scene in *Exists*.

In what ways did* The Legend of Boggy Creek *directly influence your own film-making, both in* The Blair Witch Project *and your upcoming movie,* Exists*?

Well, *Blair* was totally born from Dan's and my love of *Boggy Creek*, the way it made us feel when we were kids – hell, the way it made us feel when we watched it in college doing research for *Blair*. We wanted to bring that reality to our film, that feeling that what you were watching was real. *Exists* is the film I've wanted to make ever since I saw *Boggy Creek* back in the day. It's the first found-footage film I've done since *Blair Witch*, so I guess I've come full circle, back to the place I was when I was making *Blair*. No one watching *Exists* will be able to deny that *Boggy Creek* was a major creative inspiration on my film.

Do you feel that Pierce was unusually skillful at creating scenes of tension and fright or did the lack of budget, grainy film stock, and reliance on real people instead of actors end up working in his favour?

A bit of both, just like us on *Blair*. Something about the amateurish quality of *Boggy Creek* makes it so much scarier than if it were super slick. Same thing with *Blair*. I think Pierce knew this and realized, just like we did many years later, that lack of budget can sometimes be a good thing. Knowing how to work with these constraints and actually make them work in your favour is where Pierce's true talent came through.

Do you believe that sasquatch creatures, such as the Fouke Monster, might truly exist?

I hope they do! Honestly, I'm torn. It seems unlikely that they would still be around the United States. I would say that there is more of a possibility that they still exist in more isolated parts of the world. But then again, there are some very credible sightings that I can't really explain. I've heard the most amazing stories from people who I completely trust and have no reason to lie about what they've seen. This leads me to believe that there has to be *something* out there.

Why do you think these creatures, real or not, are so effective in horror films? Is it simply a fear of the unknown or do you think there's something in our collective psyche that puts us at odds with man-like monsters?

I think that it's the connection with us as humans that make these creatures so interesting as well as so haunting. It's like going back in time and coming face-to-face with a more primitive version of yourself. Something that isn't human, but isn't quite an animal, either. Something that shares a lot of your traits – the good and the bad. More intelligent than any animal, but still a savage at heart. And completely at home in the deep, dark woods. Just a truly classic movie monster.

LYLE BLACKBURN

Kill List

when a relentlessly sinister vibe comes from nowhere and creates a nightmarish, claustrophobic atmosphere.

The film follows a hitman named Jay (Neil Maskell) who left the game after a botched job. But when a mysterious client offers him and his partner, Gal (Michael Smiley), a large cash payoff in return for three final kills, Jay finds the offer too sweet to pass up. Things are not as straightforward as they seem though, and before he knows it, Jay's life spirals out of control in a flurry of paranoia, ultra-violence and an occult conspiracy.

Maskell and Smiley head up a small cast and do a fantastic job carrying the film, thanks to their strong onscreen chemistry. Pacing is key with this one, and Wheatley keeps you guessing till quite late, holding key story elements close to his chest. The intrigue builds up to a disturbing climax that you probably won't see coming, and will have you reaching for the remote for an instant re-watch. *Kill List* doesn't tie everything up with a neat little bow, and for that reason it will linger with you long after the first viewing.

CHARLOTTE STEAR

LADY IN A CAGE

1964/USA/94 MIN
STARRING OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND, JAMES CAAN AND JENNIFER BILLINGSLEY
DIRECTED BY WALTER GRAUMAN

Long before home invasion horror films such as *Them*, *Funny Games*, *The Strangers* and *In Their Skin*, 1964's *Lady in a Cage* gave us a lesson in white knuckle tension. When a hip operation leaves wealthy widow Mrs. Hilyard (Olivia de Havilland) unable to use the stairs in her lavish manor, she has her own personal open-air elevator installed, poignantly lined with decorative bars. While she's riding up to the second floor one lonely holiday weekend, an oblivious handyman accidentally cuts off the power, leaving her stranded twenty feet in the air.

The elevator's internal alarm attracts the attention of a homeless drifter (Jeff Corey) more interested in raiding her wine cellar than in freeing the poor woman. He loads his pockets, only to return later

Lady in a Cage

with a greedy prostitute (Ann Sothern) for more. While Hillyard uses everything at hand to try to reach a phone, what starts as a psychological horror quickly turns physical, as the house is overtaken by a trio of juvenile thugs led by Randall (James Caan), who's bent on indulging his most sadistic urges.

Aging star de Havilland rolls her eyes and desperately clutches at her expensive wardrobe in an effort to squeeze some dignity out of her fallen-from-grace part, but Caan is the ringmaster here, unbearably malicious and sexually menacing in his first credited role.

Although most of the violence is kept off-screen, *Lady In a Cage* is relentlessly suspenseful, with a barely restrained undercurrent of evil that gives the film a real edge. One can only imagine how a 1960s audience would have reacted to the raw, often brutal sensibilities of a movie that includes Caan hammering a harmless wino with a heavy lamp and de Havilland's graphic retaliation as she jabs shards of metal into her attacker's eyes.

Saturated with a chilling nihilism, *Lady In a Cage* also bridges the gap between the over-the-top mid-century shockers and the gruesome grindhouse fare of the 1970s, with a macabre cat-and-mouse game that prefigures later horrors such as *Last House on the Left* and *Death Weekend*. Going up! **PAUL COUPE**

LADY IN WHITE

1988/USA/112 MIN
STARRING LUKAS HAAS, LEN CARIOU AND ALEX ROCCO
DIRECTED BY FRANK LALOGGIA

Lady In White is equal parts old-fashioned ghost story and powerful drama – a combination rarely seen in contemporary films.

The story follows successful horror novelist Franklin Scarlatti as he returns to his seemingly idyllic hometown of Willowpoint Falls, only to discover that it harbours a deep, dark secret. Most of the movie plays out as a flashback to 1962, when little Frankie (played by Lukas Haas, three years after his breakout performance in *Witness*), is enjoying a normal American childhood with his widowed father (Alex Rocco), older brother and feisty grandparents. But a Halloween prank gets Frankie locked in his grade school's cloakroom, where he's visited by the ghost of a girl murdered a decade earlier. It seems a child killer has been stalking Willowpoint Falls for years, and the little girl calls on Frankie to help her find her mother. But the boy is attacked by the masked killer, who has returned to the school thanks to a fortuitously-timed plot device. The drunken janitor (who happens to be African-American) is assumed by all to be guilty and is taken into custody for the murders. Frankie, however, suspects someone else might be responsible and follows the clues to the tragic end.

Writer/director Frank LaLoggia invokes both the idealism of 1950s America and the burgeoning social tensions that redefined the country in the 1960s, most notably by introducing the *To Kill a Mockingbird*-style subplot of the falsely accused black man. Things get disturbing in the final reel, as an unexpected act of violence tears away the film's Norman Rockwell-style veneer of mystery to reveal the human horror underneath. **SEAN PLUMMER**

LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM

1988/UK/93 MIN
STARRING HUGH GRANT, CATHERINE OXENBERG AND AMANDA DONOHOE
DIRECTED BY KEN RUSSELL

It's a rare thing for horror and dark comedy to come together as playfully as it does in Ken Russell's adaptation of Bram Stoker's story about a town besieged by an ancient Pagan snake god. The plot of *Lair of the White Worm* isn't what you might expect from Stoker, considering the guy wrote *Dracula*, but Russell's artistic liberties pay off big-time. The unlikely combination of camp, comedy and bizarre, blasphemous imagery results in a surprisingly endearing film that continues to satisfy nearly any appetite for shock value and hilarity.

In the sleepy town of Derbyshire, Scottish archeologist Angus Flint (Peter Capaldi) discovers the strange skull of an unidentified snakelike beast and tracks it back to the local legend of the d'Ampton worm, a mythical Pagan snake, and the knight who vanquished it in the name of Christianity. The direct descendent of this knight, Lord James d'Ampton (Hugh Grant), resides in Derbyshire and

Lair of the White Worm

suspects that the creature still lurks in the caves beneath the town, so he enlists the help of Flint to explore the hollows and realize his destiny by defeating it once and for all. Their pursuit leads them to the mysterious Lady Sylvia Marsh (Amanda Donohoe) whose sex appeal and affinity for Snakes and Ladders arouses suspicion that she may be involved with recent disappearances of local townstolk.

The movie doesn't take itself too seriously and neither should you, but to dismiss it would be a grave mistake. Beyond the fairy tale storyline, *Lair of the White Worm* is punctuated with enough scares, laughs and fantastic absurdities – including gratuitous nudity, giant phalluses and a dream sequence in which nuns are graphically raped while a crucified Christ is taunted by a giant, white snake – to help you ignore the minor plot holes and loose ends. This one must be seen to be believed.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

THE LAST HORROR MOVIE

2003/UK/80 MIN
STARRING KEVIN HOWARTH, MARK STEVENSON AND JIM BYWATER
DIRECTED BY JULIAN RICHARDS

The Last Horror Movie begins as just another slasher flick. Mimicking the opening credits of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, a radio announcer details a prison break by a violent serial killer. Then, a waitress working alone in a closed diner calls to warn her child about watching scary movies alone; a rather uninspired Michael Myers clone leaps out of the shadows for the requisite metaphorical rape-by-knife and... what's this? Some asshole has taped over the freakin' screener!

"I think you'll find this more interesting," says the smiling British gentleman whose face now fills the screen – just before he smashes a man's head with a brick. "Well, you hired a horror movie, didn't you?" he asks, speaking directly to the camera. "You wanted to see something scary, right?"

His name is Max (Kevin Howarth) and he is a wedding videographer and remorseless serial killer. An otherwise charming and intelligent Englishman, Max has hijacked this videocassette to present himself to an unsuspecting public, committing a series of gory murders on camera while waxing poetic about our *appétit* for violence. Like Benoît, star of the Belgian mockumentary *Man Bites Dog* (1992), Max is philosophical about his crimes and quite self-aware. He recognizes the lack of empathy that characterizes most serial killers, and is critical of the common misconceptions that crimes like his are the result of mental illness or violent entertainment.

The Last Horror Movie is disarmingly real. If it isn't a true documentary, then it is brilliant in its execution, pardon the pun. But there is no indication that anyone involved isn't a genuine, ordinary person. The crimes documented in the film have yet to be reported on, but perhaps that is where the title comes into play. Hmmm... THE BOBE-MET

LEFT BANK

2008/BELGIUM/102 MIN
STARRING ELINE KUPPENS, MATTHIAS SCHOENAERTS AND TOM DE WISPELAERE
DIRECTED BY PIETER VAN HEES

Sometimes it's hard for a film to maintain believability when it begins to meddle in the supernatural. Belgian film *Left Bank*, however, manages to do this exceptionally well by keeping the right balance of intriguing story and creepy atmosphere.

Marie (Eline Kuppens), a young pro athlete, collapses with exhaustion and is ordered to rest for at least a month. She decides to recuperate at her boyfriend's apartment, located in a high-rise building (Left Bank) on the outskirts of Antwerp. The couple have only been together a short time and as their sexual passion for each other increases, odd things begin to happen. Marie learns the previous tenant went missing and begins to investigate the secrets that lurk in their basement. Her findings are shocking and lead her into a sinister world of the occult, making it a good candidate for a double bill with Ben Wheatley's *Kill List*.

With a storyline reminiscent of *Rosemary's Baby*, *Left Bank* is a bleak, slow-burning tale that'll have you constantly guessing. Strong turns by the two leads preserve an air of realism, Kuppens' performance is especially tough to witness, as she makes Marie's anguish genuinely raw and heartwrenching, especially as she copes with an increasing gruesome knee injury that'll have you gritting your teeth.

If the success of a movie can be measured by how long it lingers in your mind after watching it, consider *Left Bank* a rousing success. **CHARLOTTE STEAR**

LEMORA: A CHILD'S TALE OF THE SUPERNATURAL

1973/USA/80 MIN
STARRING LESLEY GILB, CHERYL "RAINBEAUX SMITH AND WILLIAM WHITTON
DIRECTED BY RICHARD BLACKBURN

The finest vampire film you've never seen, Richard Blackburn's *Lemora, A Child's Tale of the Supernatural* is an extremely literate film that plays out like Little Red Riding Hood.

Set against an unrelentingly creepy backdrop of avery gothic South in the 1930s, *Lemora* revolves around Lila Lee (the late Cheryl "Rainbeaux" Smith), a thirteen-year-old choir singer who sneaks away to the nearby town of Asteroth to make amends with her estranged father. In truth, she's headed into the clutches of Lemora (Lesley Gilb), a mysterious woman who wants to initiate the young Christian into an immoral lifestyle. Lila comes across a strange race of beast-men on a harrowing bus ride through the woods, but that's nothing compared to the macabre sights in Lemora's mansion, where she eventually learns the sinister fate of her father.

Lemora combines everything that's great about the vampire tradition, with dark sexual undercurrents that

Lemora: A Child's Tale of the Supernatural

extend from the very first frame. As the ultimate corruptible, Lila is the object of everyone's consuming lust, from the church Reverend (played by Blackburn), to the townspeople, to Lemora herself. Although the pedophilic themes were ambiguous enough to earn the film a PG rating on release in the early 1970s, they did not go unnoticed by the Catholic Legion of Decency, which immediately slapped the film with a "Condemned" rating.

Ignore the haphazard monster makeup and the rough edges – *Lemora* absolutely drips with atmosphere and presence. Blackburn's low-budget debut was restored to its full vampiric glory in 2004 with a digital makeover that will please older fans and welcome a new legion of admirers into the icy arms of Lemora, the Lady Dracula. **PAUL CORUPE**

LET SLEEPING CORPSES LIE

1974/SPAIN/95 MIN
STARRING RAY LOVELOCK, CHRISTINE GALBO AND ARTHUR KENNEDY
DIRECTED BY JORGE GRAU

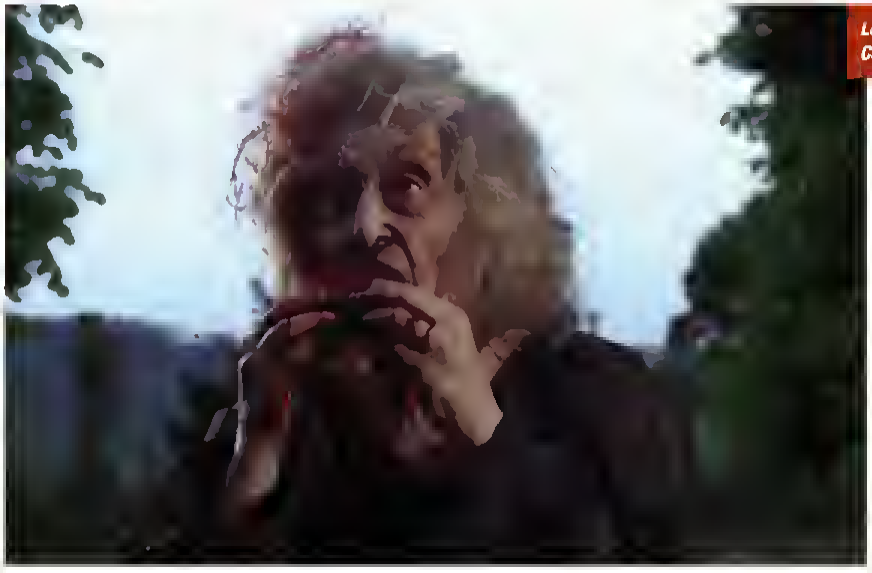
Despite the period (1974) and country of origin (Spain), this near-forgotten gem soars above the rest of those beautifully photographed but idiotic and incoherent European goretests enjoying a revival these days.

Initially released under a host of different titles (including *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* and *Don't Open the Window*), *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* has the dead reanimated (and, of course, carnivorous!) by way of radiation emitted by some newfangled farm machinery. Travelling companions George and Edna (Ray Lovelock and Christine Galbo, respectively) stumble into the midst of the carnage but have some difficulty convincing authorities that George didn't actually commit the murders himself. Hence, hero and heroine wind up on the run from both the living dead and a cartoonishly tough cop played by Arthur Kennedy.

The film isn't completely free of snags: the set-up is admittedly contrived, the pacing slow and Kennedy's Irish accent is about as convincing as David Duchovny feigning Jamaican patois, but Grau and the screenwriters compensate by showing considerably more respect for continuity and coherence than most of their Eurohorror peers.

The virtually unprecedented gore content of *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* (not least the infamous torn-off tit scene) certainly drew its share of righteous indignation from citizens and censors alike upon the film's release, resulting in multiple cuts, all of which are happily restored here. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* may well have been the outrage du jour in '74 – and admittedly, it remains a vastly superior film – but Jorge Grau doubtless deserves props for breaking taboos and opening the door for later efforts by Umberto Lenzi, Ruggerio Deodato, Lucio Fulci et al.

JOHN W. BOWEN



Let Sleeping Corpses Lie

LET THE RIGHT ONE IN

2008/SWEDEN/115 MIN
STARRING KARE HEDEBRANT
LINA LEANDERSSON AND PER RAGNAR
DIRECTED BY TOMAS ALFREDSON

Let the Right One In is an instant classic in every sense – one of the few contemporary fantastic films that will easily retain its significance 50 years from now. Stunningly photographed, scripted and performed, it's a masterpiece that haunts as deeply as it touches with equal doses of shock, tenderness, fear and sorrow, wrapped in one of the most striking works the genre has seen in ages.

Based on the novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist and staged against a snow-caked urban landscape, *Right One* depicts the transformative relationship between a lonely, bullied twelve-year-old named Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) and melancholic young girl Eli (Lina Leandersson). Eli is also twelve, but she's been twelve for many years, because she's a vampire.

Oskar stabs trees in the night, his head swirling with thoughts of bloody schoolyard vengeance, but his introverted nature ensures that he won't so much as raise his voice, let alone act on his anger. This changes when he meets Eli, and both are drawn to each other for similar but ultimately different reasons. Oskar gives Eli a sense of belonging that she hasn't felt in lifetimes and Eli gives Oskar a parallel sense of connection which awakens an inner strength he has never known.

Right One follows the classical rules of vampire mythology, reinventing each in smart and surprising ways, while functioning at its core as a poetic, individualistic beast that is equal parts an outsider coming-of-age film and a mysterious love story that explores adolescent alienation. Caustic brutality and nightmarish imagery erupt just as organically as moments of fragility, illumination and loss, sometimes punctuated by the blackest of humour, that morbidly poignant kind of comedy that could only emerge from tragedy and genuine horror. **MITCH DAVIS**

LET'S SCARE JESSICA TO DEATH

1971/USA/88 MIN
STARING ZOHRA LAMPERT, BARTON HEYMAN
AND KEVIN O'CONNOR
DIRECTED BY JOHN HANCOCK

John Hancock's elegiac ghost story *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* has wallowed in cult respectability for more than 40 years. Distinguished by its ambiguity and restraint (indeed the most lurid aspect of this movie is the title), it is nothing short of a masterpiece.

Let the Right One In

Let's Scare Jessica to Death

Written by an uncredited Lee Kalcheim (who originally conceived it as a comedy!), the script was heavily revised by Hancock, who reshaped it into a terrifying subjective mind-trip.

Jessica (Zohra Lampert), a fragile young woman recently released from a sanatorium, takes refuge at a secluded farm with her husband Duncan (Barton Heyman) and friend Woody (Kevin O'Connor). Upon arriving, the trio are startled by hippie-chick Emily (Mariclare Costello), who has been squatting in the house. Jessica takes a liking to Emily and invites her to stay, but is disturbed by her resemblance to a Victorian girl who drowned in the nearby lake.

Often read as a funeral poem to the aspirations of the Love Generation, *Jessica* is also a powerful examination of a decaying sanity (is the haunting real or all in its main character's mind?). Lampert's extraordinary, wounded performance conveys more than enough pain and confusion, but Hancock cannily makes use of whispering voices on the soundtrack to further illustrate her rapidly deteriorating psyche.

The temptation to pepper this film with more obvious shocks must have been strong, but Hancock's delicate evocations of rural Connecticut take on an ominous quality of their own as lakes and orchards are spread with shadows. As Jessica's hallucinations consume her reality, Hancock delivers one of cinema's all-time pants-wetting scary moments, during an apparently harmless daytime swim with Jessica, Emily sinks into the lake wearing a contemporary bathing costume only to suddenly re-emerge moments later in a sodden 19th-century wedding dress. Oh my God!

MICHAEL DOYLE

LIFEFORCE

1985/USA/116 MIN
STARRING STEVE RAILSBACK, MATHILDA MAY AND PETER FIRTH
DIRECTED BY TOBE HOOPER

The first entry in a lunatic triptych of films directed by Tobe Hooper for 1980s schlockmeisters supreme Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, *Lifeforce* is a film that defies classification. *Alien* scribe Dan O'Bannon (with his *Blue Thunder* collaborator Don Jakoby) adapted Colin Wilson's genre-bending novel *The Space Vampires* into a deliriously messy collision of science fiction, horror and police procedural.

Helter Skelter's resident Manson, Steve Railsback, plays the unhinged commander of a disastrous shuttle mission that's brought an extraterrestrial, life-sucking plague to Earth, and is the lone American amidst an impressive cadre of Terribly Serious British Actors. Among these English thesps: Frank Finlay (BBC's *Count Dracula*), Peter Firth (in a role that's practically a prequel to his spymaster turn on *Spooks* a.k.a. *MI-5*), *The Wicker Man*'s Aubrey Morris and a young Patrick Stewart, all apparently entrants in an unspo-

Lifeforce

ken competition to see who can chew through the most scenery Yet, despite the surfeit of thespian histrionics, everyone is collectively upstaged by Mathilda May's nearly dialogue-free performance as the alien Typhoid Mary, who strides through most of her scenes completely nude

Lifeforce veers into territory marked by body-swapping, psychic links, serial killers, naughty nurses and presumably the kitchen sink, before careening off a dramatic cliff and crashing spectacularly into an apocalyptic crescendo, with thousands of zombies overwhelming London as their life energy is carried into space – courtesy of *Star Wars* special effects maestro John Dykstra

Told you it defies classification... JOSEPH O BRIEN

THE LODGER: A STORY OF THE LONDON FOG

1927/UK/98 MINS
STARRING IVOR NOVELLO, MALCOLM KEEN AND JUNE
DIRECTED BY ALFRED HITCHCOCK

While Hitchcock's debut feature *The Pleasure Garden* (1925) plays with some of the elements of his classic films (romance, jealousy, murder), it's his third effort that sees the director fully dabbling in the suspense genre with which he will forever be associated

Based on the novel by Marie Belloc Lowndes and largely inspired by the exploits of Jack the Ripper, *The Lodger* is widely considered to be the first "true" Hitchcock film, even by the director's own estimation

British matinee idol Ivor Novello stars as the title character, who emerges from the fog one night to rent a room on the top floor of the Bunting household He soon proceeds to frolic with their bubbly blonde daughter Daisy (June Tripp, credited here as simply "June"), a turn of events that angers her other suitor, the bumbling police detective Joe (Malcolm Keen) And thus begins Hitchcock's obsession with blondes, and with undermining the law enforcement characters in his films

Meanwhile, there's a serial killer on the loose known as The Avenger who has a penchant for carving up fair-haired girls But with Joe on the case, you can't blame the Buntings for worrying about the mysterious stranger who seems to disappear every night before the murders are reported in the morning papers Could he be The Avenger?

The Lodger is Hitchcock's ode to German Expressionism and Soviet montage, two movements that would deeply influence him. The fog-shrouded appearance of Novello recalls *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, while a frenetic montage sequence depicting how the news is manufactured is pure Soviet cinema

To properly understand Hitchcock, you have to spend time with his silent films and they don't get any better than this one It's the perfect starting point for anyone interested in developing a deeper appreciation of the legendary director's monumental body of work STUART F. ANDREWS

Lord of Illusions

LORD OF ILLUSIONS

1995/USA/109 MIN
STARRING SCOTT BAKULA, KEVIN J. O'CONNOR AND FAMKE JANSSEN
DIRECTED BY CLIVE BARKER

Call it the case of the grim gumshoe. New York private eye Harry D'Amour (Scott Bakula) is hired by Dorothea (Famke Janssen), the wife of world famous illusionist Philip Swann (Kevin J. O'Connor), to protect him from potential death threats. Unfortunately for D'Amour, every case he takes on lands him smack-dab in the middle of the occult. This one is no exception, for Swann is the real deal – a true magician who has passed off his mastery of the dark arts as David Copperfield-esque illusion – and now a sinister cult with ties to his past is coming for him. Looking to avenge the death of their Manson-like leader, they're led by Nix the Puritan (a deceptively understated Daniel Von Bargen), who's also a true magician, but one with designs for the end of the world.

Of the all the films in Clive Barker's filmography, *Lord of Illusions* is one of the most underappreciated. It's a great combination of classic film noir and Barker's particular supernatural bent, which is filled with a creeping dread (amplified by Simon Boswell's ominous score). Amidst all the spells and bloodletting, it's Bakula who anchors the film as the world-weary and haunted everyman, reluctant to face the darkness yet still pushing on to keep it at bay. And while Pinhead and Candyman may get all the fan-love, Von Bargen's Nix is one of Barker's best heavies. His proclamation "I was born to murder the world" still has the power to chill.

Lord of Illusions' poor box-office brought down the curtains on plans for a D'Amour franchise, but if you're a fan of pulp detective novels and supernatural horror, having it in your collection is an open-and-shut case.

RON MCKENZIE

THE LOVED ONES

2009/AUSTRALIA/89 MIN
STARRING XAVIER SAMUEL, ROBIN MCLEAVY AND VICTORIA THAINE
DIRECTED BY SEAN BYRNE

Winner of the 2009 Midnight Madness People's Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival, this Aussie classic-in-the-making has since suffered a similar fate as that of its main character. Kept underground and away from public eyes for several years, the film went unreleased outside of its native country until 2012, by which point any chance of capitalizing on its festival buzz had pretty much passed.

That's a real shame, because *The Loved Ones* ranks up there with the best horror films of the last twenty years. The story is centered around social outcast Lola (Robin McLeavy) who, with the help of her daddy (a bugged out John Brumpton), has made a habit of confining and mutilating boys who otherwise pay her no

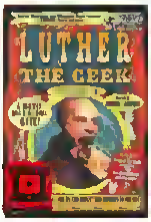
mind at school. One such unlucky fellow, Brent (Xavier Samuel), ends up in the family's clutches and endures torture, degradation and, worst yet, a mock prom (which, to be fair is both torture and degradation). But through all the foot-nailing, head-drilling, and injections of knockout serum, Brent refuses to concede defeat to Lola's mania. When Brent's real prom date Holly (Victoria Thaine) notices that he's more than a little late to meet her, she informs a local police officer who makes his way to the scene of the crime. When Brent escapes and finally meets his date, they engage one last, breathtaking showdown with Lola.

Like other filmmakers of his vintage, writer/director Sean Byrne cribs from the harsh '70s aesthetic that inspired many a torture-based film of the new millennium. The difference here, however, is that the characters are so well-drawn, the events depicted in *The Loved Ones* drain the emotions without ever insulting the intellect. This is flawless horror cinema at its absolute best and should be seen by anyone calling themselves a fan of the genre. **TAL ZIMERMAN**

The Loved Ones

LUTHER THE GEEK

1990/USA/80 MIN
STARRING EDWARD TERRY, JOAN ROTH AND STACY HAIDUK
DIRECTED BY CARLTON J. ALBRIGHT



Lost gem alert! Hoist a glass of cheap, nasty hooch skyward in honour of Lloyd Kaufman, Michael Herz and the rest of the deranged, incontinent misfits at Troma for reviving the long-overlooked *Luther the Geek*, a film aptly described in *Video Hound's Horror Show* as "The Chainsaw Massacres of Madison County."

Edward Terry is Luther, a serial killer whose *mutilatus operandi* consists of sharp metal dentures he uses to rend flesh in much the same fashion as the chicken-chomping carnival geek he once witnessed as a child. Inexplicably paroled from prison, he wastes no time getting up to his old tricks in the big city, then heads out to the sticks to get medieval on a farm family's collective ass.

No one reasonably expects Shakespearean calibre performances in a film called *Luther the Geek*, but the leads really do elevate this thing above typical slasher fare. Why Terry hasn't become a minor horror icon is a mystery – how many other actors can you name that exude such menace and pathos playing a killer whose only means of verbal communication is clucking like a chicken?

Joan Roth is also impressive as the obligatory Final Girl (or in this case, Final Middle-Aged Woman), whose climactic barn loft showdown with Luther belongs in the top five scary/funny standoffs you've never seen. And don't even get me started about uber-hot Stacy Haiduk, an unsung, underdressed scream queen if ever there was one.

So don't delay – park your tuckus in front of the ol' home entertainment centre with a bucket of the Colonel's finest artery-cloggin' deep-fried delights, a jug o' white lightnin' and a copy of Troma's *Luther the Geek* and watch the feathers fly. Buck-bucka-BRAAWK! **JOHN W. BOWEN**

MAN BITES DOG

1992/BELGIUM/95 MIN
STARRING REMY BELVAUX, ANDRE BONZEL AND BENOÎT POELVOORDE
DIRECTED BY REMY BELVAUX, ANDRE BONZEL AND BENOÎT POELVOORDE

The three-headed writing/directing team behind *Man Bites Dog* – Rémy Belvaux, André Bonzel and Benoît Poelvoorde – had only a single short film to their name when they embarked on *Man Bites Dog*. Made for a mere $100,000, over a period of two-and-a-half years, it became the highest grossing film ever made in Belgium. It earned equal amounts of adoration and condemnation on the festival circuit, picking up awards but also causing walkouts at public screenings. The director of the Tokyo Film Festival was even fired for booking the movie, before it was banned in Japan.

Why the outrage? The film features graphic content, but it's nothing that hadn't been seen before. Perhaps audiences were disturbed because the filmmakers implicated themselves and the viewers in the crimes depicted onscreen.

Man Bites Dog is a mockumentary that follows the day-to-day life of a serial killer (memorably portrayed by Belvaux). Early in the film, he's presented as an oddly charismatic character pitched somewhere between Hannibal Lector and a stand-up comedian. Sure, he kills a few people, but the tone is that of a dark Christopher Guest movie. As the film progresses, however, it becomes more disturbing. The killer starts funding the movie himself and asking the filmmakers to assist him in his crimes. At first, they perform menial tasks such as carrying bodies, but soon they become directly involved in the murders. Violence that was once ironic and funny is now painfully real and unbearably disturbing, as if to punish the audience for enjoying the ironic humour of the early sequences.

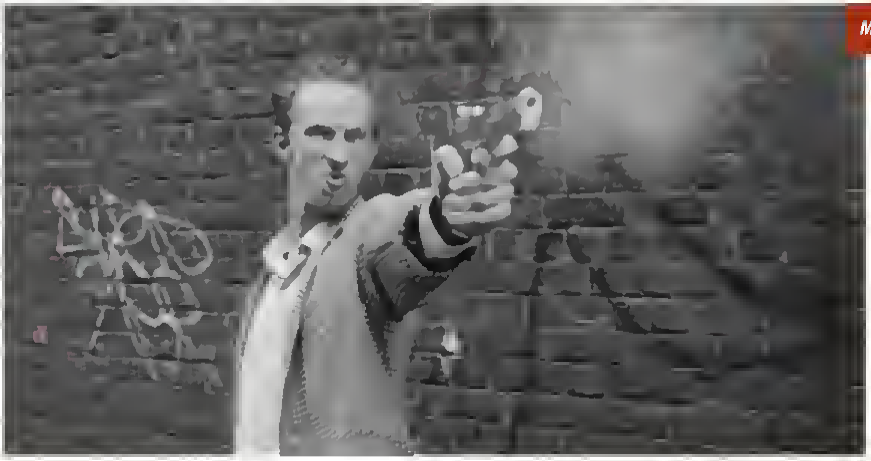
It culminates in a brutal rape and murder involving the filmmakers (played by Belvaux and Bonzel) that's so shocking it was drastically cut for the American theatrical release to avoid an NC-17 rating. However gruesome the scene may be, though, it is by no means gratuitous, rather just the moment the directors have been building towards. A film far ahead of its time, *Man Bites Dog* essentially invented the mockumentary horror subgenre. See it for that reason alone. **PHILIP BROWN**

THE MANSON FAMILY

2003/USA/95 MIN
STARRING MARCELO GAMES, MARC PITMAN AND LESLIE ORR
DIRECTED BY JIM VAN BEBBER

Written, directed and scraped together over fifteen agonizing years by renegade filmmaker Jim Van Bebber, *The Manson Family* is a kaleidoscopic, postmodern mocku-horror that exposes the events and circumstances leading up to the so-called "Charles Manson murders," which ended the hippie era in a shower of blood.

The result is a movie unlike anything ever seen; gritty, raw, unbelievably cruel, it has scarred audiences and left the press stammering through reviews. "Have no illusions," remarked the BBC, "this is exploitation filmmaking at its most insane, deranged and unforgiving."



Man Bites Dog

10 ALTERNATIVE SLASHER FILMS YOU NEED TO SEE

BY AARON VON LUPTON

THE HOUSE ON SORORITY ROW

1983/USA/91 MIN

Directed by Mark Rosman, a protege of Brian DePalma, *House on Sorority Row* is an attempt at a Hitchcockian thriller under the guise of a slasher film. Though many of the kills are off-screen and not particularly gruesome when they are shown, *Sorority Row* does boast one of the better decapitated head scenes committed to celluloid. Rosman's photography is lush and beautiful and Richard Band's orchestral score is a good fit for the film's Hitchcockian ambitions. But if there is one reason to watch it, it's the final reveal of the killer, who makes for perhaps the creepiest slasher character of all time.

INTRUDER

1989/USA 83 MIN

Co-written Scott Spiegel, who served as co-writer of *Evil Dead II*, *Intruder* takes place over the course of one night shift in a grocery store. Though essentially just another body count movie, Spiegel elevates his work with ambitious photography and style using all kinds of gonzo POV shots. Additionally, this movie launched the legendary KNB EFX company and their work here is staggering, featuring totally over-the-top latex and karo syrup carnage. The Raimi family is in full effect with Sam and Ted in supporting roles, Dan Hicks from *Evil Dead II* in a hilariously insane part as the store manager, and if you don't blink, you might catch Bruce Campbell in a brief cameo.

JUST BEFORE DAWN

1981/USA/90 MIN

There's a lot to like about this understated slasher by Jeff Lieberman (*Squirm*), but what makes *Just Before Dawn* most memorable is the film's gorgeous cinematography. Shot in a state park, the breathtaking landscape creates a dream environment for the murders and chase sequences to unfold. With shades of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Deliverance*, *Just Before Dawn* features very little blood 'n' gore, shying away from brutality in favour of creepy atmosphere and suspense, driven home by an eerie score courtesy of Brad Fiedel (*Fright Night*).

LIGHTHOUSE

1999/UK/95 MIN

The premise is genius: after a prison ship crashes and sinks, the survivors, a mix of both criminals and guards, seek refuge on a lighthouse island only to discover that one of the survivors is serial killer Leo Rook, who does not discriminate about whether or not his victims are law abiding. *Lighthouse* works phenomenally as a simple slasher, the island's craggy surface and the lighting from the sweeping spotlight create great atmosphere, and director Simon Hunter crafts some truly suspenseful and artfully directed murder set pieces, the standout being a slow, knuckle-biting stalker scene in a washroom.

MADMAN

1982/USA/88 MIN

As far as early '80s summer camp slashers go, just behind *Friday the 13th* and *The Burning* is *Madman*, a by-the-numbers killer in the woods movie that falls on just about every level... except the fun. The cast members are nothing but fodder for the axe machine that is Madman Marz, and once he gets down to business, the film does not let up. The psychotic farmer lurks behind every corner, providing frequent carnage and some occasionally creative kills – decapitation by car hood being a standout. Atrocious acting raises *Madman* to surreal levels of cheesiness, making this fodder for a drunken midnight movie crowd and an ongoing inspiration for grindcore bands everywhere.

THE PROWLER

1981/USA/99 MIN

Gore effects legend Tom Savini's most under-appreciated work is perhaps that in Joseph Zito's *The Prowler* (a.k.a., *Rosemary's Killer*). Though story and character-wise it's a fairly pedestrian affair, Zito and Savini bring new levels of cruelty and creativity to the murders, preferring prolonged scenes of sadism, including a bayonet through the head, an exploding skull and – in *The Prowler*'s nastiest scene – an excruciating throat slashing in a pool. Savini has often cited this movie as among his best work.

The Prowler

THE REDEEMER: SON OF SATAN

1978/USA/84 MIN

Also known as *Class Reunion Massacre*, *The Redeemer: Son of Satan* is actually one of the subgenre's earliest entries, shot in 1976, two full years before *Halloween*. The plot: former high school students are invited to a reunion, only to be knocked off one by one by a killer dressed in a variety of disguises, who's punishing them for their sins, including arrogance, gluttony and, um, being gay. It's bookended by a boy who rises out of a lake, gets on a school bus that appears out of nowhere, attends mass and kills a choir boy. (Equally strange: a second thumb inexplicably appears on the hands of two different characters.) It's all so thoroughly bizarre, but therein lies its appeal. Is *The Redeemer* highbrow art or just totally incompetent? It's hard to tell, but as frustrating as it may be, this mindfuck will pull you in and just might possess you forever.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE

1987/USA/85 MIN

Slaughterhouse boasts one of the most disturbing opening credit sequences in slasher history: real pig processing footage, with scenes of the animals being hung on meathooks while shiny, happy music plays overtop. It's not a bad way to set the tone for this weird hillbilly horror movie that mixes brutal violence with dumb humour – a gross cocktail that doesn't quite work but does make for an unforgettable cinematic experience. Like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the movie's backwoods wasteland gives it a distinct look and feel, making a nice location for the steady bloodstream of practical effects. Writer/director Rick Roessler's rookie workmanship is reflected in an awkward script but his camera work is far beyond what you would expect, creating an atmospheric and suspenseful summertime slaughter.

STAGEFRIGHT

1987 ITALY 90 MIN

Before creating his zombie masterpiece *Cemetery Man* (1994), Italian director Michele Soavi chose the slasher subgenre for his feature film debut, *StageFright*. A protege of Dario Argento, it isn't a shock that Soavi's film is an exercise in style over substance. To be specific, *StageFright* features some of the dumbest characters and totally illogical scenarios you will see in any slasher – and that's saying a lot. But Soavi's deft direction creates an atmosphere of intensity and beautiful dark imagery. The murders themselves are brutal and grisly in the pasta splatter tradition, and the killer, who wears an owl-head mask is simply one of the coolest and most disturbing masked mad men of all time. The movie climaxes with an absolutely gorgeous scenario in which the killer stalks the final girl to an operatic music score while feathers fall like snow.

TOURIST TRAP

1979/USA/90 MIN

Tourist Trap is a truly inventive horror film that centres on five young people who become stranded somewhere on America's lost highways and are hunted down by a Leatherface-like killer with telepathic powers and the ability to turn victims into mannequins! Though it's rated PG and is blood and nudity free, like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* before it, *Tourist Trap* makes up for that with incredibly creepy atmospherics, courtesy of art director Robert Burns (who in fact worked on *TCM*) and composer Pino Donaggio, who creates a score that reflects the weirdness of the story – a collection of female voices and screeching violins. Fans of *Tourist Trap* include Stephen King, who praised the eerie film in his film book *Danse Macabre*.

Homegrown cinematic horror has always flown a little under the radar in Canada, where the film industry tends to champion serious works of drama over genre stories, no matter how well told. So, you're forgiven if you haven't heard of the *The Mask*, a 3-D spookshow that holds the honour of being the country's first horror film.

Before making the movie, director Julian Roffman (1915–2000) had directed the beatnik-themed, youth-oriented crime drama *The Bloody Brood* (1959), and was known in the industry for introducing videotape to Canada broadcasters, but though he had great success in that business, it was not his passion.

"Around 1958 or so, my dad wanted to make feature films," says Peter Roffman, the director's son, who visited *The Mask*'s Kleinburg, Ontario, location to watch his father work. "He wanted to be known for making high art, but ended up being known for making things he wasn't that comfortable with. He was very mixed about *The Mask*."

In the film, Paul Stevens stars as Dr. Allan Barnes, a psychiatrist who receives a mask in the mail after his patient, Michael Raiden (Martin Lavut), commits suicide. Soon, the ancient South American tribal artifact, via Raiden's disembodied voice, is repeatedly beckoning the good doctor to "put The Mask on now!" – a line that also serves as a cue for audiences to don their 3-D glasses

At this point the film's style changes radically. Dr. Barnes – and the audience, via 3-D – is exposed to a trippy, hellish occult landscape that's been described as *The Seventh Seal* on acid. Shapes shift, strange arcane rituals unfold and Dr. Barnes is immersed in all manner of psychedelic imagery and madness as he pursues his fiancée, Pamela Albright (Claudette Nevins), through a surreal world populated by deformed men in tattered cloaks, a skinless demon who shoots fireballs from his twisted hands and slithering snakes that emerge from walls and columns.

Despite the disturbing visions borne from wearing the mask, Dr. Barnes finds himself increasingly compelled to put it on. As his addiction to it deepens, he struggles to keep his newfound murderous tendencies in check, lest he follow in the footsteps of his doomed patient.

"My father was always anti-drug and anti-alcohol," explains Peter of the film's obvious metaphor. Despite this, however, the filmmaker was fascinated the consciousness-expanding experiments of Timothy Leary, with whom he corresponded before the psychotropic guru was famous. In fact, the mask used in the film was even modelled after a style of 16th-century Aztec mask that was infused with peyote during vision quests.

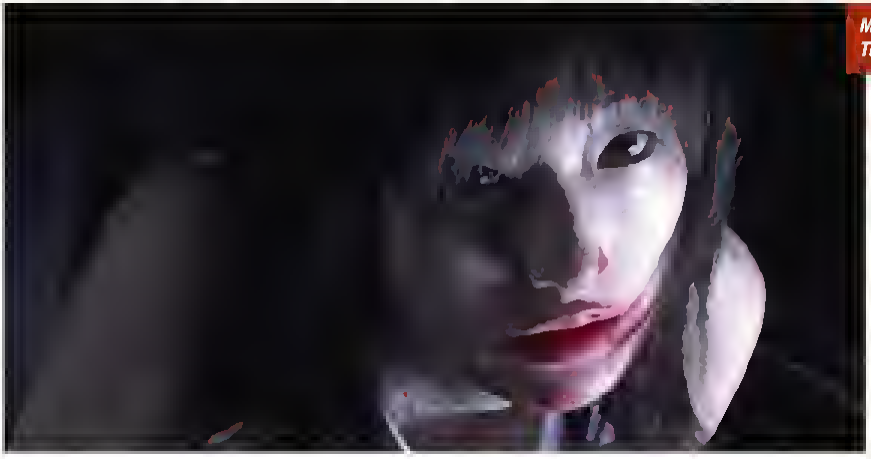
The disparity between the real-world scenes and the hallucinatory sequences featuring the mask almost makes the film feel as if it were handled by two different directors, but it is, in fact, the vision of Roffman alone.

"When my dad directed he was involved in every aspect of shooting, from the beginning 'til the end," says Peter. "He had everything storyboarded, everything prepared down to the end, and he filmed quickly. But *The Mask* took a long time because of the 3-D, and he was very proud of what he had done with that. On the other hand, he felt that it had exploitation elements in the script that he wasn't particularly fond of and didn't feel were particularly personal."

Today, while still not widely known, *The Mask* has endured. It was released multiple times during the 1960s and 1970s (under titles such as *The Eyes of Hell* and *The Spooky Movie Show*), it aired on television during the '80s 3-D resurgence and was offered up again during the home video boom. Though never given a proper DVD release, it can be found out there... waiting. Isn't it time you *put the mask on now*?

JASON PICHONSKY AND MONICA S. KUEBLER

The Mask



Marebito, The Manson Family

Perhaps Roger Ebert put it best when he called it "an act of transgression so extreme and uncompromised that it exists in a category of one film – this film."

A highly convincing pastiche of grainy interview footage, dramatic scenes and satanic dream sequences, *The Manson Family* dares to include a shocking and virtually unwatchable recreation of the infamous Tate/La Bianca killings – every stab wound intact. No question, this is a film destined to decimate its audience.

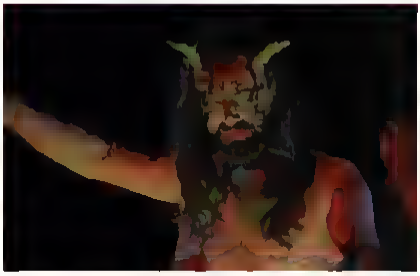
Undoubtedly, some would accuse it of crossing a line that should never be crossed. But *The Manson Family* demystifies one of America's most celebrated icons by focusing on the family itself, against whom Manson survives as little more than a frustrated musician and a relatively minor character in the events that made him famous. Tellingly, the film is also bookended by a second story arc involving a fictitious new generation of Manson followers – a powerful comment on how the events of the late 1960s continue to have an effect today.

RODRIGO GUIÑO

MAREBITO

2004/JAPAN/92 MIN
STARRING SHINYA TSUKAMOTO
TOMOMI MIYASHITA AND KAZUHIRO NAKAHARA
DIRECTED BY TAKASHI SHIMIZU

Takashi Shimizu has made and remade so many versions of his famous *Ju-On* – or *Juon* or *The Grudge* – that you'd be forgiven for missing 2004's *Marebito*, a non-J-horror film that blends Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* with H.P. Lovecraft



for a terrifying trip into the uncanny.

The journey begins with freelance cameraman Masuoka (played by acclaimed Japanese filmmaker Shinya Tsukamoto, director of *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*) recording a bloody suicide in an underground passageway. The event triggers an obsession that leads him deep into the Tokyo underground, beneath utility pipes, down spiral staircases, through pre-war tunnels and past a crazed homeless man who warns him of DEROs (Detrimental Robots), the humanoid critters Masuoka glimpses in the corridors. Or are they just in his mind? With his camera lighting the way, he edges ever closer to a Lovecraftian underworld, once at the bottom, he discovers someone, or more accurately some*thing*, that's both monstrous and arousing, dangerous and fragile. He brings the creature to the surface, and uses the camera to further probe his own, and his guest's, tears and desires – with murderous consequences.

This is a must-see, both for its chilling and original Lovecraft-filtered-through-Japanese-culture approach to horror voyeurism, and because Shimizu shot this incredibly ambitious work in an astonishing eight days (between the first two Japanese theatrical

Martin

installments of *Ju-On*). The key is to allow yourself to sink into *Marebito*'s murky madness. As its tortured protagonist says, "It doesn't matter if I've lost my mind, but I want to stay sane long enough to recognize the terror." DAVE ALEXANDER

MARTIN

1976/USA/95 MIN
STARRING JOHN AMPLAS, CHRISTINE FORREST AND LINCOLN MAAZEL
DIRECTED BY GEORGE A. ROMERO

Budding horror fans generally tend to start from the top and work down, beginning with the more popular entries in the canons of the genre's most celebrated figures. For George A. Romero, his pre-millennial *Dead* trilogy is often what gets chewed through first, followed by his mainstream hit *Creepshow*. Just past the fringes of his most seen works lies one of the moodiest and most unique vampire films ever made, *Martin*.

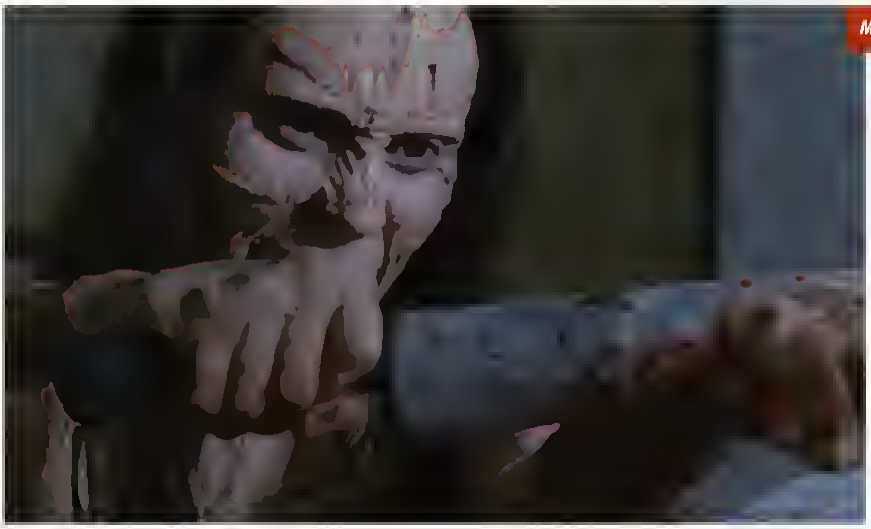
In it, a visibly jaded misfit is sent to live with his superstitious uncle in the hopes that the elder will impart some form of direction to the boy's life. But Martin isn't just some bored teenager looking to find himself, he's possibly an 80-year-old vampire whose black-and-white flashbacks reveal a taste for blood that dates back to a bygone era. While his uncle sees him as sinister, the town locals have taken a liking to what they view as a misunderstood kid who just needs a friend. But Martin's bloodlust, whether it is motivated by teenage angst or legitimate vampirism proves insatiable, and a meal is made of a few unlucky folks.

The film's strengths are many. There's the fantastic performance by John Amplas as the androgynous lead vamp, not to mention Tom Savini's effects work (*Martin* was his first of many collaborations with Romero). But what makes the movie so memorable is the unique standpoint from which it approaches the well-worn vampire mythos. *Martin* references human identity, adolescent alienation and even addiction. Given the bloodsucker's stagy roots as an exotic aristocrat, it's no wonder *Martin* isn't on the top of most mainstream lists of essential bloodsucker cinema. Their loss. TAL ZIMERMAN

MARTYRS

2008/FRANCE CANADA/99 MIN
STARRING MORJANA ALAOUI
MYLENE JAMPANOI AND CATHERINE BEGIN
DIRECTED BY PASCAL LAUGIER

Think you're desensitized to graphic portrayals of violence? Think again. It's harder than ever to shock genre fans with gore nowadays, but *Martyrs* stands out from the recent overabundance of forgettable torture porn flicks due to the philosophical lifeblood that pulses through its twisted veins. By removing the religious



Martyrs

connotation from the concept of martyrdom, the film uses starkly realist violence and unflinching brutality to explore the psychological dimensions of suffering and the cyclical nature of abuse.

Lucie (Mylène Jampanoï) and Anna (Morjana Alaoui) share a very special bond, having grown up together as roommates in an orphanage. Lucie is tormented by the severe childhood abuse she endured, which she won't discuss with anyone but Anna. The boundaries of their co-dependent relationship get tested when Lucie tracks down her tormenters fifteen years later, and has the opportunity to realize her bloodiest revenge fantasy. From Anna's point of view (as well as ours), it's difficult to determine whether Lucie's anguish is real or a figment of her traumatic past, but she soon discovers that Lucie's demons stem from a wider organization devoted to the study of corporeal suffering in the hopes of being rewarded with special insight into the afterlife.

The inevitability of death is a disturbing subject for most of us and *Martyrs* presents a truly chilling meditation on how far some of us are willing to go to appease that anxiety. Laugier's careful treatment of the subject matter avoids the blatant misogyny that would have resulted had the film been made by cruder hands, but Anna's torment is never the least bit tantalizing or sexualized. Between the shotgun blasts, razorblade slashings and bare-fisted beatings lies a chilling implication that there is abject virtue in severe corporeal punishment, and just as martyrs suffer for a purpose, the reward for enduring the film is a final macabre twist that will burn the movie into your mind forever. **ANDREA SUBISSATI**

MAY

2002/USA/93 MIN
STARRING ANGELA BETTIS, JEREMY SISTO AND ANNA FARIS
DIRECTED BY LUCKY MCKEE

Lucky McKee made his directorial debut with this twisted tale that blends *Carrie* with *Re-Animator* in a dark and bloody modern Frankenstein story. Angela Bettis plays May, a surgical technician at a veterinarian's office with poor social skills who makes her own clothes and has a penchant for blood. The sociopathic seamstress grew up isolated and ostracized by her peers, a result of the patch her mother forced her to wear over her lazy eye most of her life. To make matters worse, her best friend is a creepy, glass-cased homemade doll her deranged mom gave her along with the advice: "If you can't find a friend, make one."

Despite her insecurities, May is the focus of her coworker's lesbian affections, and she even manages to strike up a date with handsome Adam (Jeremy Sisto). But rejection and ridicule ensue, forcing May to make her mama proud by creating a true friend from the best parts of the people around her.

May starts out like a dark comedy, but ends up taking us to a bizarre and gruesome place as we watch her delicate mind crack and descend into madness. Bettis perfectly captures May's psychological evolution from timid to treacherous to downright scary. The disturbing yet bizarrely touching denouement juxtaposes love and gore

in a way that can only be described as horrifically beautiful. EMMA ANDERSON

MIMIC 3: SENTINEL

2003/USA/77 MIN
STARRING LANCE HENRIKSEN, KARL GEARY AND ALEXIS DZIENA
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JT PETTY

Rear Window with giant cockroaches – it's a concept that's as weird as it is intriguing. When JT Petty (*S&Man*, *The Burrowers*) was given the reins to *Mimic 3: Sentinel*, he decided to essentially remake the famous Hitchcock film, except instead of suspecting the man in the apartment across the street of murder, our housebound protagonist watches person-sized mutant 'roaches pick off his neighbours.

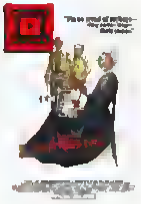
Shot in Eastern Europe on a ridiculously low-budget, it stars Karl Geary (*The Burrowers*) as a sickly germaphobic survivor of the cockroach plague (explored in the previous films) who spends most of his time in his room taking pictures of the building across the way. Helped by his sis and an attractive neighbour, he discovers that people are being dragged off by shadowy figures. Eventually they uncover some dirty deeds involving a renowned entomologist (played with relish by Lance Henriksen) who's angered the "Judas Breed" insects, bringing their roachy wrath down on the 'hood.

Petty does a bang-up job of making what should've been a derivative bug flick (much like the terrible first sequel) into a claustrophic tale steeped in mystery and intrigue. The characters are compelling, and the bugs, while mostly cloaked in film noir-style shadows until the end, take on a new kind of predatory menace as they relentlessly pursue something that's been taken from them – right up until the explosive ending. It's a fantastic example of how to revitalize a creature feature on a very small budget by looking at the threat from a new/old angle.

DAVE ALEXANDER

MOTHER'S DAY

1980/USA/90 MIN
STARRING NANCY HENDRICKSON, DEBORAH LUCE AND TIANA PIERCE
DIRECTED BY CHARLES KAUFMAN



It isn't clear what director Charles Kaufman (brother of Troma head honcho Lloyd) was aiming for with this early horror comedy and, as a result, audiences to this day aren't sure how to react to its mix of goofy humour and disturbing violence. Therein lies its charm.

Though it has a holiday title, was released the same year as *Friday the 13th*, and is set in the backwoods of America, *Mother's Day* is more survival horror than slasher. It tells the story of three female friends who get together for their annual camping trip, only to come under attack by two dumbass hillbillies who kidnap them and bring them to meet their insane mother, who resides in a pigsty house in the middle of the woods. Once there, mother instructs her sons to rape and abuse the girls, and they eventually kill one after a prolonged beating. The other two

Mimic 3: Sentinel

escape, then return to seek revenge, *Last House on the Left*-style.

While all of that sounds particularly nasty and disturting, the over-the-top performances of mother and her Tweedledee and Tweedledum sons add a slapstick element more stylistically in line with Troma's best-known output. The effect is decidedly comedic, but audiences will probably feel awkward about what they are laughing at.

Some, including director Eli Roth, have likened *Mother's Day* to a criticism of the rampant consumerism of the day, which isn't as much of a stretch as you might think, considering Charles' brother Lloyd's penchant for injecting political commentary into his horror comedies. There is, however, a much more obvious feminist underpinning that comes through in the conversations shared between the characters at the beginning, and their transformation from victims to fighters in the end.

AARON VON LUPTON

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES

2002/USA/119 MIN
STARRING RICHARD GERE, LAURA LINNEY AND WILL PATTON
DIRECTED BY MARK PELLINGTON

When *The Mothman Prophecies* hit theatres a decade ago, aliens dominated America's fascination with the paranormal (thanks to *The X-Files*), and old-school monsters of legend and lore had fallen to the wayside to a certain extent. Of those cryptozoological beasties, one of the lesser known of the lesser knowns is the Mothman, a winged, flame-eyed creature that supposedly terrified the residents of small-town Point Pleasant, Vermont, for two years during the mid-1960s. The Mothman became the obsession of one John A. Keel, a journalist who travelled to the state to investigate the strange goings-on there.

His adventures became the basis for the 1975 novel *The Mothman Prophecies*, in which Keel recorded two years worth of accounts detailing UFOs, Men in Black and surprise visits by the Mothman itself, who possessed an ability to predict future events.

In the film adaptation, Richard Gere plays Keel, whose name has been changed to John Klein. He's life has been tragically touched by the legend when he and his wife, Mary (Debra Messing), get in a car accident that results from the couple being spooked by a bizarre creature with glowing eyes. Her injuries aren't life-threatening, but the doctors discover a brain tumour, and it's not long before Klein is a widower. Two years later, still recovering, he takes a midnight drive only to end up in Vermont, 400 miles from where he started out.

Mysterious and almost unbearably creepy from the get-go, *The Mothman Prophecies* has enough jolts in the first half alone to seriously spook you (people were literally screaming at the preview). Director Mark Pellington works the audience well, keeping a tight focus on the mysteries at hand.

Don't let Richard Gere's name on the marquee dissuade you from seeing this film, either. *The Mothman Prophecies* is as a mature horror movie – frightening, unsettling and displaying a remarkable insight into the psychology of grief. AARON VON LUPTON

The Mothman Prophecies

MR. BROOKS

2007/USA/120 MIN
STARRING KEVIN COSTNER DEMI MOORE AND DANE COOK
DIRECTED BY BRUCE A EVANS

Mr Brooks arrived in theatres and then promptly disappeared like a stalker in the night That's too bad because despite its over-plotting and lack of clarity, it's one of the most unique takes on the serial killer genre and makes for a massively interesting character study, bolstered by brilliant performances courtesy of William Hurt and – don't laugh – Kevin Costner as the anti-hero of the film's title

Brooks is a successful, wealthy, loving husband and father Yet, he also suffers from a secret addiction to murder – a disease in which he is egged on by his darker alter ego, played here by a sardonic Hurt After winning the Man of the Year award from the Portland Chamber of Commerce, Brooks relapses and kills a couple of lovebirds; his first victims in two years Unfortunately (for him), he's photographed by a peeping Tom who coerces Brooks into taking him on as a serial killer apprentice in order to experience the thrill of murder first hand Meanwhile, the killing reignites an investigation by a female detective (Demi Moore) who has been on Brooks' case for years without success There's actually another killer on her trail, though, and if that sounds like a lot of plot, well, it doesn't end there

There's a lot going on in *Mr Brooks*, and the movie's message is not straightforward Are we supposed to believe that murder can actually be an addiction? Or is the film simply a Jekyll-and-Hyde look at the duality of good and evil? Regardless, the questions and possible answers in *Mr Brooks* makes it one of the most thought-provoking thrillers in some time And whatever it's about, Costner's twisted yet introspective character makes for a truly memorable bad guy Maybe now we can finally forgive him for *Waterworld*

AARON VON LUPTON

THE NAMELESS

1999/SPAIN/102 MIN
STARRING EMMA VILARASAU KARRA ELEJALDE AND TRISTAN ULLOA
DIRECTED BY JAUME BALAGUERO

Years before he made a name for himself with *[REC]*, Jaume Balaguero's first feature proved that he already knew a thing or two about claustrophobic dread

Based on the 1981 Ramsey Campbell novel of the same name, *The Nameless* begins with the discovery of the mutilated corpse of a six-year-old girl Only identifiable by a bracelet and the

Mr. Brooks

fact that one leg is three inches shorter than the other, it seems to be Angela, the missing daughter of Claudia (Emma Villarasau) and her husband Marc (Brendan Price). Five years pass when Claudia, now addicted to tranquilizers, receives a call from a girl claiming to be Angela, who pleads to be rescued but can't give a location before the line goes dead. Claudia, shocked but hopeful, calls the now-retired officer originally assigned to the case, Massera (Karra Elejalde), and together they try to unravel the mystery, along with a writer, Quiroga (Tristan Ulloa), from a parapsychology magazine who has insight on the unfolding events.

Their investigation leads them to a cult called The Nameless, which has ties to Nazi Germany and is known to sacrifice children. If that isn't chilling enough, Claudia has an ex-boyfriend stalker, a video tape of what appears to be a snuff film appears, and a visit to the cult's imprisoned leader – who suffers from a terrible skin disease – unearths even more horrifying information. By the time the film climaxes at an abandoned motel, you'll feel like you've been sucked into a world where an unimaginable evil really exists.

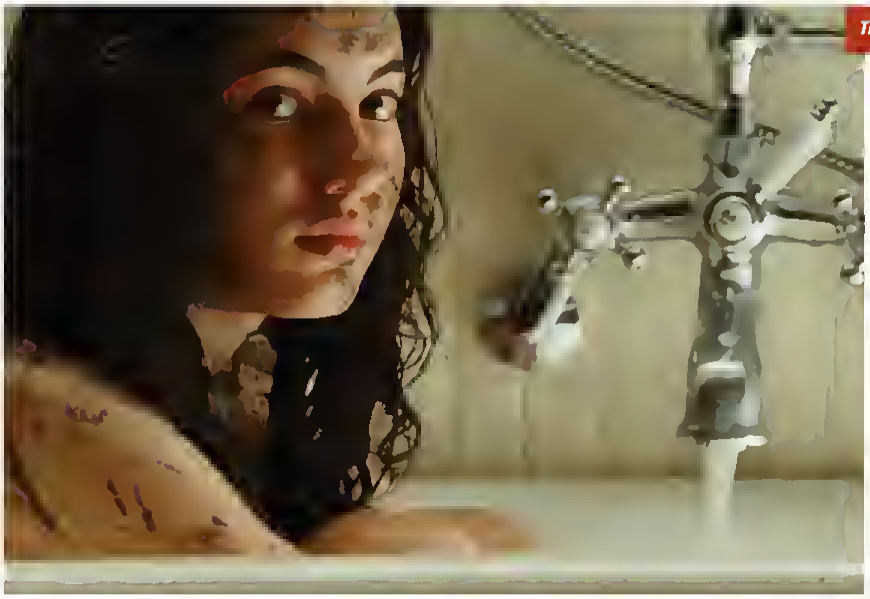
The Nameless is a serious, suffocating film, and Balaguerò makes us afraid of the dark and the monstrous things it disgorges in way you probably haven't felt since childhood. He masterfully manipulates our worst fears and then shows us new ones we didn't even know we had. **DAVE ALEXANDER**

THE NEW DAUGHTER

2009/USA SPAIN/100 MIN
STARRING KEVIN COSTNER, IVANA BAQUERO AND GATTLIN GRIFFITH
DIRECTED BY LUIS BERDEJO

If you judge a DVD by its cover, you'd never know that *The New Daughter* is actually a powerhouse of a horror movie. Kevin Costner cradling a shotgun while a girl stands behind him in the shadows – hell, you probably wouldn't even know it's a horror movie at all.

This adaptation of the chilling, highly original short story by award-winning Irish author John Connolly sees a single-parent family move into an isolated house on the outskirts of a town in South Carolina. Costner plays John James, an author learning to care for his teenaged daughter Louisa (*Pan's Labyrinth* star Ivana Baquero) and young son Sam (Gattlin Griffith) after his wife abandoned them for a new man. Raging with hormones and anger, Louisa hates their new home and takes to exploring the woods that surround the property. That's where she finds a large, ancient burial mound. When she starts acting strangely – sleepwalking, disappearing and returning home covered in dirt and clutching a bizarre straw doll – John



The New Daughter

The Night Flier

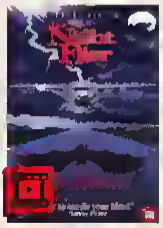
investigates the history of the house, discovering that the previous owners went missing and that the hill in the backyard hosts things that want his daughter.

Directed by Luis Berdejo, co-writer of *[REC]*, and scored by Oscar-nominated composer Javier Navarrete (*The Devil's Backbone*, *Pan's Labyrinth*), this accomplished American-Spanish co-production is a criminally under-appreciated dark fairy tale with a mythology, mystery and monsters all of its own.

DAVE ALEXANDER

THE NIGHT FLIER

1998/USA ITALY/93 MIN
STARRING MIGUEL FERRER, JULIE ENTWISLE AND DAN MONAHAN
DIRECTED BY MARK PAVIA



Vampires by and large have gotten pretty lame at the hands of horror filmmakers. Most have opted to retrace the steps Bram Stoker laid out in the 1800s: vampire enters community, vampire threatens community, Van Helsing character arrives, vampire is hunted and dispensed by a wooden stake through the heart. It may be classic, but it's also pretty stale.

Enter Dwight Renfield, the vampire of *The Night Flier*, who flies his jet-black Cessna over middle America, landing in tiny isolated airports late at night. He is – what we see of him – a kind of traditional vampire, he wears a long black cape and riding boots, but he is also very different in that he defiles his victims, Jeffrey Dahmer-like, before disappearing into the skies once again.

The story appeals to trash tabloid editor Merton Morrison (Dan Monahan), who assigns the case to his top writer/photographer Richard Dees (Miguel Ferrer). A giant, comic book character of a man, Dees is sympathetic in being so utterly despicable – a man who has no scruples and whose sentiments go miles beyond cynicism. He takes the assignment, climbs aboard his own plane and sets out, business as usual, to break the story on what he thinks is America's latest serial killer.

The film does the best thing it can do at this point, which is to isolate Dees as he undergoes his hunt for the sinister aviator, whom he comes to discover only through the trail of carnage left behind and the peculiar stories, seen in flashbacks, of the witnesses. Bodies at the morgue caught in the cold flashes of Dees' camera and eerie dream sequences build up a vampire monster different from the one we typically see in theatres. Contrary to what the DVD cover indicates, director Mark Pavia prefers to build tension by concentrating on the black, impenetrable windows of the Cessna and suggesting its occupant with disquieting silhouettes. Spooky stuff. RODRIGO GUDIÑO

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER

1955/USA/93 MIN
STARRING ROBERT MITCHUM,
SHELLEY WINTERS AND LILLIAN GISH
DIRECTED BY CHARLES LAUGHTON

More often a staple of film noir lists than horror guides, Charles Laughton's haunting masterpiece is one of the most unsettling films in these pages. Murdered parents, religious zealotry gone brutally awry, children at the mercy of a remorseless monster – call it a thriller if you want, but it sounds like classic horror to me.

Robert Mitchum, who would portray another of cinema's most chilling psychopaths in 1962's *Cape Fear*, stars as Harry Powell, a serial-killing preacher roaming the Depression-era countryside. When Powell is arrested for theft, he shares a cell with Ben Harper (Peter Graves), a family man who lands on death row for his role in a botched robbery that resulted in two deaths. Ben is executed, but not before inadvertently revealing to his cellmate that he stashed his $10,000 take, and that his young children know where it is. When Powell is turned loose, he hunts down eight-year-old Johnny and five-year-old Pearl, marrying their widowed mother (Shelley Winters) in an attempt to get to the cash. With no adults to protect them, the kids embark on a trek down the Ohio River with the murderous preacher in pursuit.

Eerie, elegiac and relentlessly suspenseful, *Night of the Hunter* is one of the most striking instances of American Gothic ever committed to film. Laughton's dark fairy tale takes its visual cues from Expressionist horror and post-war crime flicks, fusing them into a singularly beautiful nightmare. Though it opts for implied threats over explicit violence, at least one image – a murdered woman's body drifting at the bottom of a river – stands toe-to-toe with any of the era's most disturbing visuals. It's one of the great tragedies of American cinema that Laughton, who played Quasimodo in RKO's 1939 adaptation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, never directed another feature.

APRIL SNELLINGS

NIGHTWATCH

1994/DENMARK/107 MIN
STARRING NIKOLAJ COSTER WALDAU
SOFIE GRABOL AND KIM BODNIA
DIRECTED BY OLE BORNEDAL

It's not unusual for a foreign film to be remade for English-speaking audiences, but there aren't many instances of a film being remade by the same director a scant four years later. Apparently, in this particular case, the Miramax brain trust actually kept Danish filmmaker Ole Bornedal's 1994 nail-biter *Nattevagten* (a.k.a. *Nightwatch*) from getting distribution in North America in favour of remaking it

The Night of the Hunter

NIGHT OF THE CREEPS

1986/USA/88 MIN
STARRING JASON [illegible] TOM ATKINS
AND STEVE MARSHALL
DIRECTED BY FRED DEKKER

When it comes to quintessential horror from the '80s, it's hard to top the 1986 splatter comedy *Night of the Creeps*.

Equal parts sci-fi, horror and comedy, the film begins in the 1950s with an alien parasite invading earth to turn humans into zombies. The threat is contained for decades until two geeky students, Chris (Jason Lively) and J.C (Steve Marshall) steal a frozen body from a campus medical lab as part of a frat initiation, unleashing the little wrigglers, which then infect the nubile bodies of the student body. Zombie hell breaks out on prom night, but luckily a hard-boiled cop Ray Cameron (Tom Atkins) is on the case to shoot first and, well, shoot later.

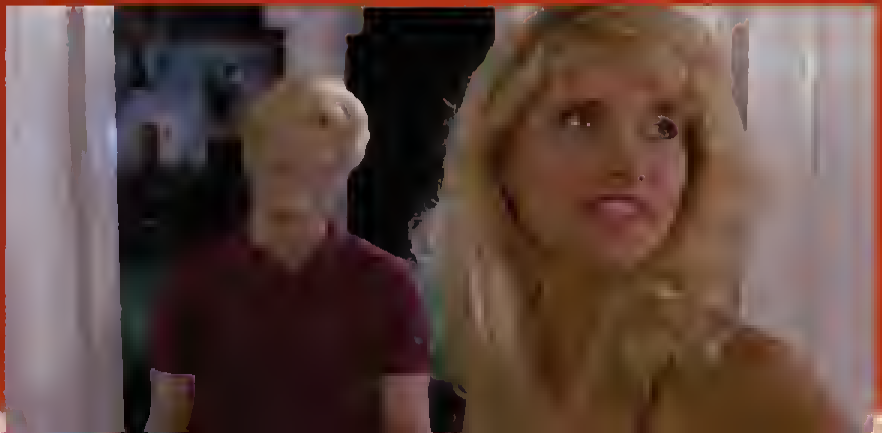
The movie performed poorly during its initial domestic theatrical run but went on to enjoy success on TV and home video. Such is the fate of many films ahead of their time, and now that genre mashups are all the rage (especially when it comes to zombie comedies), we tap director Fred Dekker for some reflection on his underrated debut feature.

***What is the genesis of* Night of the Creeps?**

Honestly, I was consciously greedy from B-movie clichés. I started with the hard-drinking detective, but I also wanted to do some *Animal House*-style college hijinks. That bought me the two main characters, Chris [Jason Lively] and J.C [Steve Marshall]. I wanted to inject a little romance into the proceedings, so I needed an ingénue – hence, Cynthia. The rest was just tying these characters together, as well as taking as many crusty horror/sci-fi tropes as possible (space aliens, zombies, axe murderers, [illegible] into the stew. The fact that it's remotely coherent is kind of shocking.

How did you secure financing for something so outrageous and how much studio intervention was there during production?

The script was highly regarded and I had a short sizzle reel that the studio thought was okay, so getting the green light was surprisingly easy. The first cut had some problems, including a weak finale, so they were kind enough to give me some more money to shoot for a few more days and give it some pizzazz. For example, the scene at the end of the zombies attacking the garden shed was a reshoot. But the studio was otherwise pretty hands-off.



Night of the Creeps

On one hand you had Jason Lively, Steve Marshall, and Jill Whitlow who were relative newcomers to feature films, and on the other hand, you had Tom Atkins, a twenty-year veteran of film and TV. Were there any generational clashes to contend with?

No, Steve and Jason tried to get Tom's goat now and then, but they were hopelessly outgunned. Seriously, Jill and the guys were fantastic, and we remain friends to this day. Without meaning disrespect to the many wonderful actors I've worked with, I have to say that working with Tom on this movie was the highlight of my career as far as working with actors.

Many of the film's zombies were played by the FX artists. Why use them as opposed to stunt people or actors?

Simple, because I knew they'd be in the FX shop doing the makeups anyway! Why bring actors in when those guys were already there, on the payroll? Plus, at the time they all looked like frat boys.

Among the FX artists on the film were the guys who would ultimately form KNB Effects Group; were their makeup roles more pronounced than the other FX artists on set?

Howard Berger and Robert Kurtzman were working for our makeup FX designer David Miller at the time, and it was very much a team effort, very democratic. Oddly, I only met Greg Nicotero (the "N" in KNB) very recently, at a Masters of Horror dinner.

Steve Miner is credited as second-unit director on* Night of the Creeps. *What was your relationship with him at the time?

Steve gave me my first script assignment in Hollywood and, obviously, also directed *House*. He was always very encouraging of my directing career, so I didn't think twice about asking him to shoot the "preparing for the formal" montage.

After* 28 Days Later, *zombies in film turned into athletic, screaming monsters as opposed to crawling, creeping ghouls. What's your opinion on the post-millennial undead?

I happen to believe – and I've felt this from early childhood when I would lay in bed and hear my own heartbeat thumping in my pillow and imagine it was Frankenstein's monster walking through the woods to get me – that slow is scarier than fast. Period. Slow means waiting, dread, mounting fear. Fast means "Don't worry, it'll be over quick." No contest.

TAL ZIMERMAN

Nightwatch

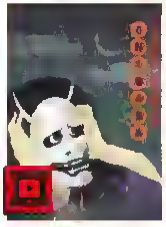
with bankable stars such as Nick Nolte, Ewan McGregor and Patricia Arquette. Nonetheless, we should at least be grateful that Bornedal was willing to helm that project himself.

Law student Martin (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) takes a job as night watchman at the local morgue right around the time a serial killer is dispatching a number of prostitutes in strikingly grisly fashion. When a rather bizarre bet Martin makes with his best friend Jens (Kim Bodnia) goes awry, he becomes a suspect himself. Sound a bit familiar? Sure, the plot reeks of the type of giallo potboilers Dario Argento and friends have been churning out for decades, but *Nattevagten* actually has superb performances and a solid and occasionally brilliant script that's much more than a preposterous excuse to set up a bunch of elaborate scares.

Impressive is not only Bornedal's formidable talent for building suspense; his handling of the volatile group dynamics between Martin, Jens and their respective girlfriends is so assured that I'd be interested to see what he could do with a straight-up drama. Seldom have characterization and atmospherics melded so well in a gory whodunnit. Had *Nattevagten* been made before *Silence of the Lambs*, or even released in North America before *Se7en*, it would doubtless be hailed as one of the most innovative mystery/thrillers of the 20th century. JOHN W. BOWEN

ONIBABA

1964/JAPAN/103 MIN
STARRING NOBUKO OTOWA
YOSHIMURA JITSUKO AND KEI SATO
DIRECTED BY KANETO SHINDO



Notable as the first Japanese horror movie to be expansively distributed in the West, *Onibaba* is also an accomplished illustration of the *kaidan eiga*, though its supernatural content is nearly non-existent. Kaneto Shindô had forged his reputation with contemporary

Onibaba

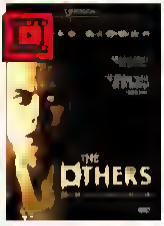
left-wing social dramas, but with this – his eighteenth film in fifteen years – he proved equally adept at atmospheric period horror.

Set in a medieval Japan ravaged by clan warfare, *Onibaba* is the tale of an elderly peasant widow (Nobuko Otowa) and her daughter-in-law (Yoshimura Jitsuko) who ambush and kill deserting samurai, disposing of their bodies in a pit, and selling their armour to buy food. One day a neighbour, Hachi (Kei Sato), enters their secluded dwelling and begins an affair with the younger woman. Fearing she will be abandoned, the widow removes a demonic-looking feudal mask from one of her victims in order to frighten her superstitious companion away from Hachi. However, the widow discovers that the mask has become fastened to her face...

Onibaba's earthy eroticism only descends into outright horror in the closing minutes as the daughter-in-law attempts to remove the suppurating mask with a series of poorly aimed hammer blows. It is an excruciating sequence arriving shortly after a dreamlike passage where the demon rises silently out of the windblown reeds illuminated by a spotlight. This sudden shift from the intense realism Shindô has cultivated is jarring but works beautifully – as does Hikaru Hayashi's jazzy score, which is a frenzied deluge of thundering percussion and orgasmic cries. Preserving the simplicity of a folk tale, *Onibaba* cautions against the primitive lusts that tether us to the fragile, withering prisons of our own flesh. MICHAEL DOYLE

THE OTHERS

2001/USA SPAIN FRANCE ITALY/101 MIN
STARRING NICOLE KIDMAN ALAKINA MANN AND JAMES BENTLEY
DIRECTED BY ALEJANDRO AMENABAR



Historical ghost stories are a rare thing these days, but it was more of a surprise to see one at the turn of the millenium when *Scream* sequels and their offspring were the big draw at the multiplex. *The Others* is a gothic melodrama about a woman named Grace (Nicole Kidman) who resides with her two children in a gloomy, cloistered mansion. The children are allegedly afflicted by a curious disease that renders them extremely sensitive to natural light, and so they while away their days in a perpetual night of candles and the religious oppression of their mother, who is clearly in knots over her husband's prolonged absence due to the war.

Enter a trio of servants: a kindly butler, his matronly wife and their mute daughter who skulks through corridors that whisper when no one is there. Soon, doors

are left unlocked, footsteps are heard in empty rooms and the piano begins to play on its own. The kids also start to talk about a little boy and a strange old woman who have taken up residence in the house.

Writer/director Alejandro Amenábar (*Tesis*) uses *The Others* as a showcase of gothic visuals, a perpetual fog creeps over the courtyard, tall windows stare out like soulless eyes and pale faces peer from the whispering darkness. He tells his story in hushed tones and lingering silences, spooking the audience with a fog of stifling gloom and off-camera ghosts. *The Others* draws more than its share from *Burnt Offerings*, *The Haunting*, *The Innocents* and *The Sixth Sense* but, when you think about it, those are damn good movies to use for inspiration. **RODRIGO GUDIÑO**

PAPERHOUSE

1988/UK/92 MIN
STARRING CHARLOTTE BURKE, JANE BERTISH AND SAMANTHA CAHILL
DIRECTED BY BERNARD ROSE

When it came out in the late '80s, *Paperhouse* was hailed by *Variety* as "the thinking person's *Nightmare on Elm Street*," yet it ultimately suffered from a deceptive marketing campaign that failed to capture the essence of this harrowing coming-of-age story. When preteen Anna (Charlotte Burke) comes down with a severe case of glandular fever, she begins having a series of vivid dreams based around her drawing of a fictitious house. As her fever worsens, her dreams become increasingly strange, and she discovers that by adding to the drawing in her waking life, she can alter the landscape of her nighttime world. So she draws a young boy named Marc, with whom she becomes friends, and her dreams soon become a refuge from the physical discomfort of her waking life. But when Anna sketches her absent father into the picture, she accidentally depicts him with an angry expression and crosses him out. But sure enough, her father appears in her dreams, a disfigured monster who has come for his daughter.

Presented as an out-and-out shocker in its trailer, many horror fans were taken off guard by the tonal shift during the film's sentimental final act, which sees it go from a killer-dad romp to an eleven-year-old girl's coming-of-age tale. While *Paperhouse* may have the perilous dream aspect to justify a comparison to Wes Craven's classic (as well as a villain with a scarred face), the film is in fact a symbolic fairy tale more akin to something like Richard Blackburn's stylish curio *Lemora: A Child's Tale of the Supernatural*.

Horror cinema is littered with absent parental figures, and here Anna's resentment towards her wayward father manifests itself in his incarnation as the boogeyman. Coupled with the girl's burgeoning sexuality, as presented in her relationship with the young Marc, *Paperhouse* offers an unexpectedly complex ex-

Paperhouse

ploration of the pains and discoveries of early adolescence. MICHAEL BLYTH

PARENTS

1988/USA/82 MIN
STARRING RANDY QUAID, MARY BETH HURT AND SANDY DENNIS
DIRECTED BY BOB BALABAN

The late, great Ken Russell once said of *Parents*, it makes "David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* look like Care Bears." Arriving at a time when horror movies such as *The Stepfather* and *The 'Burbs* were satirizing the comfortable ideals and middle-class values of Reagan-era domesticity, this impressive directorial debut from character actor Bob Balaban was a far-less visible but no-less worthy entry to this modest subgenre.

Set in 1950s suburban America (but lensed in Toronto) it's the story of the terrifyingly normal Laemle family. Dad (Randy Quaid in a deliciously creepy turn) develops defoliants at the Toxico Company between organizing barbecues and playing golf, while Mom (Mary Beth Hurt) is the immaculately-dressed homemaker, always perfecting an unceasing array of meat dishes. Their nervous, nightmare-plagued son, Michael (Bryan Madorsky), suddenly begins to question the ingredients and source of Mom's unappetizing cooking, and becomes increasingly convinced that his parents are cannibals.

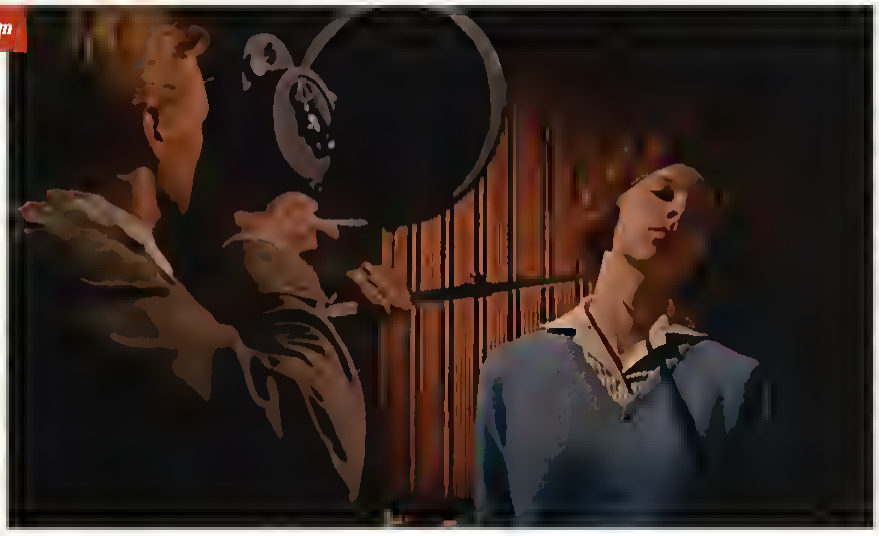
Balaban's subversive stew of nostalgia and paranoia is, quite naturally, about surfaces. From the reassuringly whiter-than-white soapbox smiles to the starched outfits and hideously kitsch décor, the film peers through the sanitized veneer of Eisenhower Americana to the moist, dark heart beating beneath. Although the marriage of comedy and horror is at times an uneasy one (and *Parents* does concede much of its ambiguity and quiet power to disturb during a hyperbolic finale), it does succeed admirably in penetrating the darkness of the adult world from the perspective of a child. It is not uncommon for a pre-adolescent to interpret sexual intercourse between consenting adults as an act of violence, but here Balaban turns such a scenario into a sweaty, pulsating revelry of flesh as Michael stumbles upon Mom and Dad rutting in their pristine living room.

Parents is required viewing, but be warned: you'll never look at your folks the same way again! MICHAEL BOYLE

PEEPING TOM

1960/UK/101 MIN
STARRING KARLHEINZ BOHM, MOIRA SHEARER AND ANNA MASSEY
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL POWELL

When *Peeping Tom* was first released, it invited a barrage of scathing criticism. "The sickest and filthiest film I remember seeing," said *The Spectator*; *The Daily Worker* called it "perverted nonsense"; and *The Tribune* spewed, "the only really satisfactory way to dispose of *Peeping Tom* would be to shovel it up and flush it swiftly down the nearest sewer."


Peeping Tom

The film's overwhelming perversity sucker-punched viewers, much like Tod Browning's *Freaks* did before it. And just like *Freaks* undid Browning's directorial career, *Peeping Tom* made Powell – who was known for his critical and artistic successes such as *Black Narcissus* and *A Canterbury Tale* – a cinematic pariah in his native England.

Despite this, *Peeping Tom* was eventually celebrated as a self-aware masterpiece because of its shocking visuals, utter individuality and rich subtext about the nature of cinema, voyeurism and violence. Thanks to vocal admiration from other filmmakers, notably Martin Scorsese, who arranged for the film's restoration years later, *Peeping Tom* slowly achieved "classic" status among academics and genre fans.

The film follows Mark Lewis (Karlheinz Böhm), a meek cinematographer's assistant who, as a boy, was subjected to a series of filmed fear experiments at the hands of his father, a biologist (and perverse voyeur). Having reached manhood, Mark is sexually and mentally stunted and, more importantly, he is a scoptophiliac – a ravening voyeur. Surrounding himself with photographic equipment, he strokes his ever-present 16mm camera with disturbing affection. His overpowering obsession with film and fear compels him to murder women, photograph their deaths, and, later, to savour their final terrified moments on celluloid. Moreover, his camera's tripod is loaded with a phallic knife, for simultaneous filming and killing.

Structured like a Chinese puzzle box, *Peeping Tom* reveals boundless, often contradictory layers on repeat viewings. Even so, at the heart of its complexities rests a simple question, and its answer. "Do you know what the most frightening thing in the world is?," Mark purrs. "It's fear." JUSTIN HUMPHREYS

PERDITA DURANGO

1997/MEXICO USA,SPAIN/126 MIN
STARRING ROSIE PEREZ, JAVIER BARDEM AND JAMES GANDOLFINI
DIRECTED BY ALEX DE LA IGLESIA

Satan lives! Somewhere near the Mexican/American border to be precise, and he's got long black hair, wears alligator boots and talks with a thick chicano accent. Or so this excellent little film, which is bowled over with sex, gunfire and voodoo magic, has us convinced.

Perdita Durango (a title later changed to *Dance With the Devil* – couldn't these guys have thought of something less generic?) is a wild, blackly comical ride through a romanticized underworld of Latino, California. The movie kicks off on the chance, perhaps fated, meeting between Romeo (Javier Bardem) and Perdita (Rosie Perez). After a few moments of checking out their respective power tools, it's obvious that the two are made for each other. They embark on a drug heist, kidnap some white kids for fun and get up to some creepy voodoo shit in some out-of-the-way *jacal* in the New Mexico desert. They also get chased by cops, family members, and betray co-criminals and the oc-

Perdita Durango

casional freak that, apparently, is the common denizen of the borderlands. All things told, *Perdita Durango* is the film that Quentin Tarantino never made.

Plot complications come faster than bullets and manage to give greater depth to the characters rather than detracting from them. Romeo and Perdita develop something strangely like love, but almost like hate, and their hysterical captives eventually become like their dysfunctional, incestuous kids.

While it's not out-and-out horror, it does have a lion's share of savagery. It's also funny, lighter than a funeral drum and boasts two of the wickedest criminals you're ever going to see. This is the version you want to check out, unrated and long; it's definitely worth doing the research to get the right copy, 'cause there's only one way to do it. Dance with the devil, that is. RODRIGO GUDIÑO

PERFUME: THE STORY OF A MURDERER

2006/GERMANY FRANCE SPAIN USA/147 MIN
STARRING BEN WHISHAW, DUSTIN HOFFMAN AND ALAN RICKMAN
DIRECTED BY TOM TYKWER

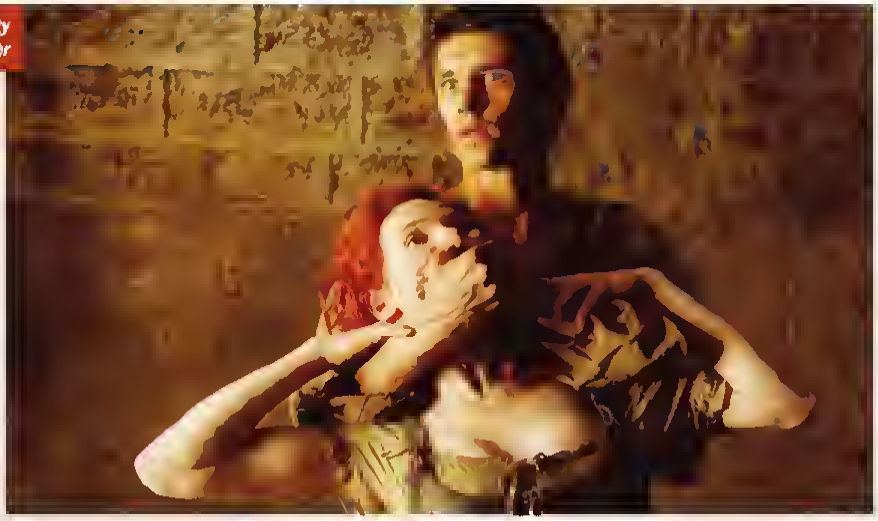
Hopes are always high when a name director – especially one acclaimed as much in the art world as in the commercial one – decides to take on a horror story. Sometimes the results are classic (Kubrick's *The Shining*), other times disappointing (Boyle's *28 Days Later*), and occasionally pointless (Van Sant's *Psycho*), but they are seldom uninteresting.

And that's what we have with *Perfume*, German wünder-director Tom Tykwer's stab at not quite making a horror film, but dousing his artsy serial killer period opus with the scent of spilled blood. *Perfume* is the story of French orphan Jean-Baptiste Grenouille (Ben Whishaw), birthed amidst rotting fish only to develop a superior – almost supernatural – sense of smell.

As a grown slave, Grenouille is taken to Paris where he catches his first whiff of woman... and lands his first kill. Later, as an adept of the heavily powdered perfumist Giuseppe Baldini (Dustin Hoffman), he is seized with the idea of creating the ultimate perfume out of – what else? – the sweet smell of female. Leaving a trail of skinned corpses in his wake, the obsessive Grenouille turns his eye on Laura Richis (Rachel Hurd-Wood), the prize of the Parisian nobility, much to the horror of her puffy aristocratic father (Alan Rickman).

Although the science in this film is about as sound as Raelian cloning, that doesn't stop Tykwer from focusing on his killer's murderous technique, which includes shoring his victims of their hair, marinating their naked bodies in lard and distilling an olfactory ingredient with some alchemical tinkering. No question, this film is interesting and unusual. Really unusual. Its ballsy script alone, which hangs on a string of contrivances that continually dare ridicule, is worth looking into even if you decide, in the end, to call the dare. In a time when the serial killer subgenre is practically the definition of derivative, *Perfume* is – for better or for worse – a whiff of something uniquely fresh.

RODRIGO GUDIÑO



Perfume: The Story of a Murderer

PHANTASM II

1988/USA/89 MIN
STARRING REGGIE BANNISTER, JAMES LEGROS AND ANGUS SCRIMM
DIRECTED BY DON COSCARELLI

If director Don Coscarelli has carved out a sub-niche within the horror genre, it's from the position of unpredictable weirdo. While most filmmakers scour the tool shed looking for murder weapons that their sub-moronic killers use to off nubiles, Coscarelli employs flying metal spheres that suck the brains out of people's heads. His 1979 classic *Phantasm* pit a BMX-riding kid and an ice cream truck driver against an otherworldly undertaker, the Tall Man, bent on enslaving the human race by shrinking his unlucky victims down to half-size, then sending them off to another dimension. Confused? Then you get it.

For *Phantasm 2*, the action picks up a few years later. This time, the Tall Man (Angus Scrimm) has laid waste to several towns, but Reggie (Reggie Bannister) and Mike (James LeGros) return, and helping them on their crusade is Reggie's badass Plymouth HemiCuda and a four-barrelled shotgun able to take out numerous marauding midgets with one deadly squeeze of the trigger. As the duo make their way through decrepit locations filled with emptied graveyards and abandoned neighbourhoods, Mike – who has spent the time between films in a mental institution – begins to see visions of a girl who is also engaged in a struggle against the forces of evil. They eventually team up to vanquish the Tall Man back to the world from whence he came.

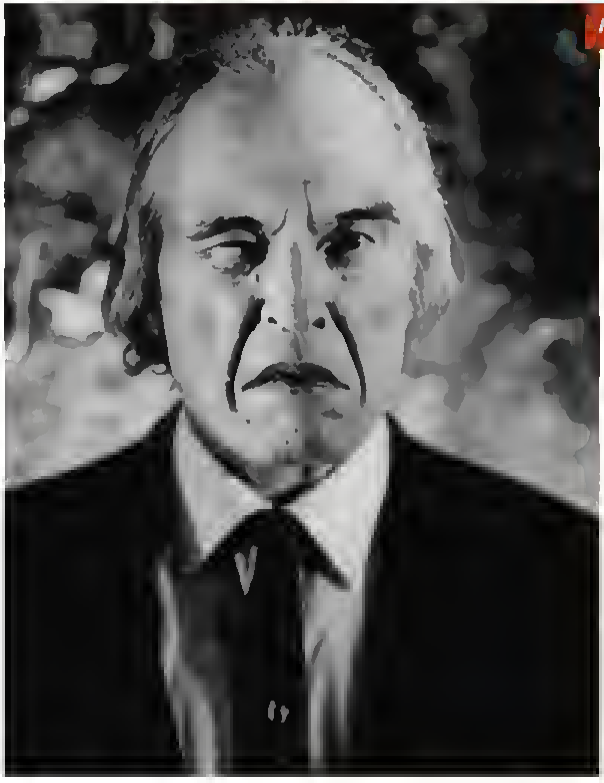
Upon its initial theatrical release, *Phantasm 2* became a financial success and subsequently developed a following on home video. Even so, it took years (21, from the time it first hit screens to be exact) to appear on domestic DVD and while the true Phans kept the fires burning, new audiences really had to dig if they wanted to experience the gooey goodness for themselves. Coscarelli is one of the most creative directors the horror genre has ever known, and *Phantasm 2* is nothing less than his magnum opus.

TAL ZIMERMAN

PRINCE OF DARKNESS

1987/USA/101 MIN
STARRING DONALD PLEASENCE, JAMESON PARKER AND VICTOR WONG
DIRECTED BY JOHN CARPENTER

It's ironic that critics who equated the intellectual profundity of John Carpenter's early films with the depth of a parking lot puddle should also dismiss this striking blend of quantum mechanics and theological horror as confusing, earnest froth. Heralding the legendary director's return to his



Phantasm II

10 SO AWFUL THEY'RE AMAZING HORROR FILMS YOU NEED TO SEE

BY JOHN W. HOWEN

BIROEMIC: SHOCK AND TERROR

2010 USA/90 MIN

If you're a schlock horror devotee and *Rue Morgue*'s Editor-in-Chief says, "Dude, this thing is shaping up to be the next *Troll 2*," well, you tend to sit up and take notice. With a rumoured budget of $10,000 and the worst CGI effects since, well, ever, self-proclaimed Master of Romantic Thrillers James Nguyen weighs in with his take on Hitchcock's *The Birds*, in which everything is blamed on global warming. Nguyen is stingy with action until about the 35-minute mark, but when those eagles and condors get going, the going gets hilarious.

THE GIANT CLAW

1957/USA 75 MIN

The 1950s presented us with no shortage of giggle-inducing nuclear mutants and giant space monsters, but the titular gangly, dangly, googly-eyed gooney-bird-on-a-wire on offer here – "from some godforsaken antimatter galaxy millions and millions of light years from the Earth" – has to be the most ludicrous critter of the era. Even the monster-hungry audiences laughed themselves silly at the spectacle, prompting star Jeff Morrow (*This Island Earth*) to make a sneaky early exit from the film's Hollywood premiere.

THE GREEN SLIME

1968/USA JAPAN AUSTRALIA /90 MIN

Normally, a space station under siege by shrieking, tentacled, one-eyed, electrified space monsters is enough to get most of us on board for 90 minutes. But a love triangle subplot involving cowboy star Robert Horton, ubiquitous B-hero Richard Jaekel and Bond girl Luciana Paluzzi is what nails us to our seats. Oh, and those darling miniature sets. And hysterically bad special effects. And that theme song. "Green shiiiiiime!!!" Any doubters left? Alright, let's move on.

THE HORROR OF PARTY BEACH

1964/USA/78 MIN

Necessity, in this case, was the mother of a Z-grade cult classic. Beach blanket movies and horror films were doing big business in '64, so a New York theatre chain owner (or several New England drive-in proprietors, according to another version) staked director Del Tenney to a meagre budget to mash up the two genres profitably. Tenney delivered this tale of sea monsters terrorizing an East Coast resort town, replete with ludicrous rubber-suited creatures, excruciatingly bad acting and a rad surf soundtrack by the Del-Aires. Irresistible.

THE INCREDIBLE MELTING MAN

1977/USA/84 MIN

Prior to its re-release on DVD in 2012, this gory gut-buster had largely flown under the radar. Alex

Rebar is the titular mess, an astronaut who returns to Earth from a disastrous mission to Saturn and promptly begins melting and eating people. We don't get an explanation, but we do get plenty of violence, silly dialogue, a bit of nudity and footage of children smoking cigarettes, plus, check out the melty makeup effects by Rick Baker, and appearances by cult starlet Cheryl "Rambeaux" Smith, Janus Blythe (Wes Craven's original *The Hills Have Eyes*) and Jonathan Demme.

INVASION OF THE BLOOD FARMERS

1972/USA 84 MIN

It had a budget of $24,000 and didn't make its money back. The actors were paid in beer. Writer/director Ed Adlum would subsequently write, produce and don a yeti costume in *Shriek of the Mutilated*. What? You actually need more information than that? Fine. In rural Upstate New York, a modern-day druid cult attempts to revive its long-dead queen with blood transfusions from unwilling live donors, all while dressed as farmers to avoid arousing suspicion. Seriously.

PIECES

1982/ SPAIN,USA,PUERTO RICO, ITALY/89 MIN

Nursing a grudge against his mother (don't ask – it's all very Freudian), a mad slasher wreaks havoc on a university campus with a chainsaw. How does he manage to sneak around undetected while dismembering hot young things with a big, noisy power tool? By hiding it behind his back, or under his coat. That's the type of logical universe we're in here, and while some touches of humour are obviously intentional, the biggest laughs – and they are plentiful – derive from inept plotting, bizarre non-sequiturs and bombastic performances.

The Incredible Melting Man

ROCK 'N' ROLL NIGHTMARE

1987/CANADA/83 MIN

By the mid-'80s, bodybuilder-turned-pop-metal singer Jon Mikl Thor had amassed a sufficient cult following on the North American bar circuit that the leap to movies seemed logical. (Somehow.) The result was this howlingly inept $50,000 misfire about a band attempting to record at a demon-infested rural studio outside of Toronto. The final showdown on the studio floor between studded-codpiece-clad Thor and satanic puppets is essential viewing.

THE SWARM

1977/USA/116 MIN

"Oh my god, bees! Bees! Millions of bees!" When multi-million dollar studio films fail, they're usually just trite, dull and tacky, but disaster/sci-fi/horror hybrid *The Swarm* – in which killer bees attack a small Texas town full of A-listers and fading Hollywood royalty – is an epic guffaw-fest in a category all its own. Imagine Ed Wood with a huge budget and you're halfway there. Michael Caine has flat-out declared it the worst film he was ever in, and it's safe to assume Henry Fonda, Katharine Ross, Richard Widmark ("Will history blame me, or the bees?") and loads more felt the same way. Pure, hot buttered schadenfreude – all you can eat.

TROLL 2

1990/ITALY/95 MIN

While on vacation in Nilbog (read it backwards), a kid and his dead grandfather must save the family from being eaten by goblins. Hilariously bad films are plentiful (this list could easily expand to 30 titles) but *Troll 2* is the only one at present that threatens to unseat *Plan Nine From Outer Space* from its dubious throne. Despite being widely available on home video for years, theatrical screenings of *T2* regularly draw sizable crowds, and the acclaimed 2009 documentary *Best Worst Movie* is now almost as popular as the film itself.

PIN: A PLASTIC NIGHTMARE

1988/CANADA/103 MIN
STARRING DAVID HEWLETT, TERRY O'QUINN AND CYNTHIA PRESTON
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY [illegible]

Released amongst a goggle of sequels to *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, this overlooked Canadian gem stands head and shoulders above other late-'80s fright fare. Based on the 1981 novel by Andrew Neiderman, the film tells of a deeply disturbed young man, Leon (David Hewlett), and the abnormal relationship he shares with his younger sister, Ursula (Cynthia Preston), and an anatomically correct medical mannequin named "Pin."

Isolated as a child by an obsessive-compulsive mother (Bronwen Mantel), young Leon grows up to form an unnatural bond with the life-sized figure, which is housed in the office of his physician father, Dr. Linden (Terry O'Quinn), and used by the doctor to teach sex education to his children. After their parents are killed in a car crash, Leon brings Pin home to live with him and Ursula, eventually outfitting the doll with a suit, fake skin and a wig. When the appearance of an aunt, and a young man with affections for Ursula, threatens the bizarre trio, Leon decides that he and Pin must take care of the outsiders.

A truly unsettling offering that doesn't rely on violence or gore to make its viewers' skin crawl, *Pin* benefits from first-rate performances by its cast (Hewlett, in particular, is stellar) and the assured direction of writer/director Sandor Stern (also well known for penning the screenplay for 1979's *The Amityville Horror*). The victim of poor theatrical distribution, this Montreal-shot film has slowly built a cult following for its oddball premise and the deeply unsettling Pin doll. Stern intends to remake the film, but in the meantime revisits his perfectly creepy *Plastic Nightmare*.

What is it about Andrew Neiderman's novel that grabbed you?

When I read the book, what struck me – and this is something that has always interested me – is the fact that you can find siblings taking different paths in life. But how can that possibly be? They grew up in the same family. Well, the fact is that none of us grow up in the same family. Every single one of us has a different relationship with our parents. So, that's what really fascinated me about it. On top of that was the whole schizophrenic element, which – because I'm a physician – really interested me. So, those were the primary reasons why I wanted to do it.

Did you incorporate any aspects of your own experiences as a doctor into the character of Dr. Linden?

No. Not really. Because the medical aspect of the story isn't really that significant. He happens to be a doctor – and that's the reason for him having the anatomical dummy – but aside from that, he's a man who has difficulty dealing with his children. He's very stunted, socially, and, like his wife, is obsessive-compulsive.

The reason he uses Pin in the first place is because he can't really communicate with his children.

Yes. That's the starting gate. Who wouldn't like to talk to his children about sex education himself? Well, he obviously has issues. So, when the kids are laughing after the deaths [of their parents], about their mother washing his penis, they're very aware of the fact that they had very repressed parents.

Speaking of sexuality in the movie, there's a rather disturbing scene involving Pin and a nurse.

I remember that I wanted to humanize Pin a bit more in the mind of Leon. So, I came up with the scene of the nurse [using the anatomical figure as a sex aid], which I thought was effective and made Pin seem more human.

Pin's face seems to wear an expression of distress, as though being violated. Was that your intent?

Yes. I wanted that intentionally because I wanted Leon to feel that [Pin] was being abused. And after all, it's all from Leon's point of view. So, all the minor facial expressions that are there, are expressions that are laid onto Pin because of Leon's point of view – that this is how Pin should feel about it.

Was the Pin doll made specially for the movie?

He was specifically made for the film and was the most expensive actor in the movie. We also used a mime in some scenes – like the wheelchair scenes, when Pin is in silhouette.

Pin: A Plastic Nightmare

low-budget independent roots after several soul-sapping studio assignments, *Prince of Darkness* was conceived as a tribute to the works of Nigel Kneale (the *Quatermass* cycle, *The Stone Tape*) by way of H P Lovecraft and the claustrophobic siege narratives of Carpenter's own *Assault on Precinct 13* and *The Fog*.

Prince of Darkness

A priest (Donald Pleasence) learns of an enigmatic Catholic sect that has been guarding a seven-million-year-old canister of liquid located beneath a Los Angeles church. Summoning renowned physicist Professor Birack (Victor Wong) and his team of student scientists to investigate, they discover that the canister holds the concentrated essence of Satan – entombed by his father, the Anti-God – and it's trying to get out, possessing schizophrenic homeless people (including one played memorably by Alice Cooper) and members of the research team.

Always in command of every aspect of his craft, this sorely underrated masterwork reveals Carpenter at his most precise (and perhaps most terrifying). The taut, ten-minute opening titles sequence (scored with one of Carpenter and composer Alan Howarth's most ominous cues) brilliantly establishes an assortment of characters, plots and themes whilst engineering a prevailing air of dread. The doom-laden atmosphere and thickening tension build inexorably to a shattering climax as the isolated scientists are overwhelmed by unholy forces and must make a terrible sacrifice to save mankind.

A card-carrying atheist, Carpenter seems to be suggesting that science will one day supplant religion as our guiding source of enlightenment, but if his similarly apocalyptic *The Thing* is – as some critics maintain – about "the death of the heart," then *Prince of Darkness* is a savage paean to the selfless persistence of the humanistic soul in the oozing face of unknowable evil. MICHAEL DOYLE

PSYCHO II

1983/USA/113 MIN
STARRING ANTHONY PERKINS, VERA MILES AND MEG TILLY
DIRECTED BY RICHARD FRANKLIN

Twenty-three-years after Alfred Hitchcock changed the course of horror history with *Psycho*, Universal Pictures let loose a low budget follow-up that remains one of the greatest horror sequels ever produced.

It was Tom Holland's suspense-filled scripts for '80s minor cult classics *The Beast*

Despite the fact that it got some great reviews, Pin didn't fare well at the box office. Do you think this can be attributed to it not receiving a wide US theatrical release?

It got no release. By the time I delivered it, [New World] was out of the feature film business; they were gone as a feature film studio. So, it went direct to video. It only got a feature film release in Canada. Of course, I was incredibly disappointed by that.

What is it about your film that you feel resonates with audiences?

Part of it is that it has a sense of reality to it. The story comes out of the psychology of these characters, so there's a sense of honesty about it. And I think that you're not watching a movie where you have ill feelings towards the protagonist. You feel bad for [Leon] because you know where he comes from, you know what started all of this for him. You feel terrible for him, and you feel terrible for his sister because she's trying to be as strong as she can possibly be for her brother, knowing all the time that he's very ill, and wanting to protect him. There's a strong familiar bond here that people recognize.

JAMES BURRELL

PULSE

2001/JAPAN/118 MIN
STARRING HARUHIK[illegible]ATO, KUMIKO ASŌ
AND KOYUKI
DIRECTED BY KIYOS[illegible]KUROSAWA

There's an airless dread that permeates nearly every frame of Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Pulse* (a.k.a , *Kairo*) – a hushed mix of the unknowable, unsettling and uncanny that sets it apart from the slew of other contemporary Japanese ghost films. Although it features a supernatural threat transmitted through technology, otherworldly stains and a teen movie cast, it flips those all too familiar elements into a horrifying story unlike any other. Although Kurosawa – also known for unorthodox genre films such as *Cure* and *Séance* – taught *Ju-on* creator Takashi Shimizu, and helped produce the first films in that series, his own work is a radical departure from them, the *Ringu* films and their many copycats.

In a decayed, washed-out and emotionally disconnected version of Tokyo, a group of students commit suicide or simply disappear after encountering a website that asks, "Do you want to see a ghost?" They return as ominous spirits lurking in the darkness, but not the kind shrouded by long black hair that lurch mechanically down staircases or rise out of the plumbing. Sorrowful but deadly, they inexplicably appear and spread, bringing with them confusion, madness and suicide. They aren't there to terrorize a select cursed few, but to usher in the Apocalypse. As the world's population dwindles, a rapidly shrinking group of survivors vainly try to comprehend why.

Both the narrative and visuals are often murky and surreal, and an explanation for the terror is always just out of reach, which makes for both an enveloping horror experience and a tough sell to mainstream Western audiences, so it's no surprise that it took four years for the 2001 film to find North American distribution. Avoid the predictable American remake co-scripted by Wes Craven, this is the version you want to see. The director tells *Rue Morgue* why *Pulse* is unlike any ghost story ever envisioned.

Why are the themes of ghosts, technology and suicide so integral to the film?

The reason that technology is often an agent, or a force, or a presence for ghosts is that it's relatively recent that technology has entered the daily lives of the Japanese. The one strain that all J-horror films have in common are that the ghosts appear in the context of a perfectly normal daily life, so instead of taking the Western trope of visiting a graveyard or going to a mansion, where you'd find ghosts, these ghosts just pop up in the course of one's everyday life, and because internet and video or whatever were relatively recent introductions to Japanese daily life, it was just a very convenient medium. In terms of suicide, one of the reasons that I like to employ it is that nothing is more predictable and common than death – everyone dies – but in contemporary society we live our lives completely shielded from that fact, in complete denial of it. Nevertheless, it's as basic as human life can get. Certainly that's not the case on a battlefield, where death is everywhere, but anywhere other than the battlefield you live in complete denial of death. What suicide offers is a chance to suddenly render death not only palpable but everywhere – in a way we all hold the potential for suicide – that's why it's a very convenient device.

What's the significance of the film's title?

The literal translation of the original title *Kairo* would be "circuit" but in Japanese that would mean both an organic and an inorganic circuit, whereas in English circuit tends to have a more inorganic nuance to it. So I was interested in getting a sense of life itself and the larger circuitry of life, that would include, of course, the beating of the heart and the pulse.

The ending is both apocalyptic and strangely upbeat. How should viewers interpret this?

Obviously, however the viewers interpret the ending is really up to them, but I'd say that after the utter destruction and resulting despair, there's kind of a hope for a new beginning at the end of the film, so the ending is definitely heading towards hope, if there could be a modicum of hope in the appreciation of the ending, that would be gratifying.

Aside from the depiction of specific supernatural and technological fears, what makes* Pulse *– and even films like* Ringu *and* Ju-on *– stand out from Hollywood horror films?

What I would say about *The Ring*, which came out before my film, and then, of course *The Grudge*, is that they're really distinct, unique *Japanese* films. Although they were big, big hits, they're still more calm and deliberate than a Hollywood film, for instance, and relatively rooted in daily life.

DAVE ALEXANDER

Pulse

Within and *Class of 1984* that caught the eye of *Psycho II* director, the late Australian filmmaker Richard Franklin (*Patrick*, *Road Games*). And while the sequel was originally intended as a "cheap as chips" cable movie, Franklin and screenwriter Holland (also director of '80s classics *Fright Night* and *Child's Play*) set their sights on something considerably more ambitious.

Psycho II finds a supposedly "cured" Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) released from a mental hospital, much to the chagrin of one Lila Loomis (Vera Miles reprising her role from the original), the surviving sister of Norman's infamous shower victim Marion Crane (Janet Leigh). Norman returns to the Bates Motel and the all too familiar house on the hill to begin life anew as a short order cook at a local diner. He soon takes a shine to his young co-worker, the troubled Mary, played by 22-year-old Meg Tilly (*Agnes of God*). But little does he know that Mary is actually Loomis' daughter and part of a conspiracy designed to plunge the fragile Norman back into irretrievable madness. Meanwhile, it seems Mother's up to her old tricks again and she proceeds to pick off the supporting cast with a battery of brutal but inspired kills.

Thanks to Holland's red herring-riddled script, Franklin's taught, stylish direction, Jerry Goldsmith's spellbinding score, a great cast and a virtuoso performance from Perkins, *Psycho II* was an instant hit with filmgoers when it was released in the summer of '83, even if now it does get lost somewhat in the gigantic shadow of *Psycho*. As the tagline for the sequel promised, "The Bates Motel is back in business!" **STUART F. ANDREWS**

PSYCHOMANIA

1973/UK/90 MIN
STARRING NICKY HENSON, MARY LARKIN AND GEORGE SANDERS
DIRECTED BY DON SHARP

Helmed by the late, great Don Sharp (*Rasputin The Mad Monk*) with an unforgettable, experimental prog rock score by John Cameron (Kes), *Psychomania* may well boast the most berserk plot of any British horror movie of the '70s.

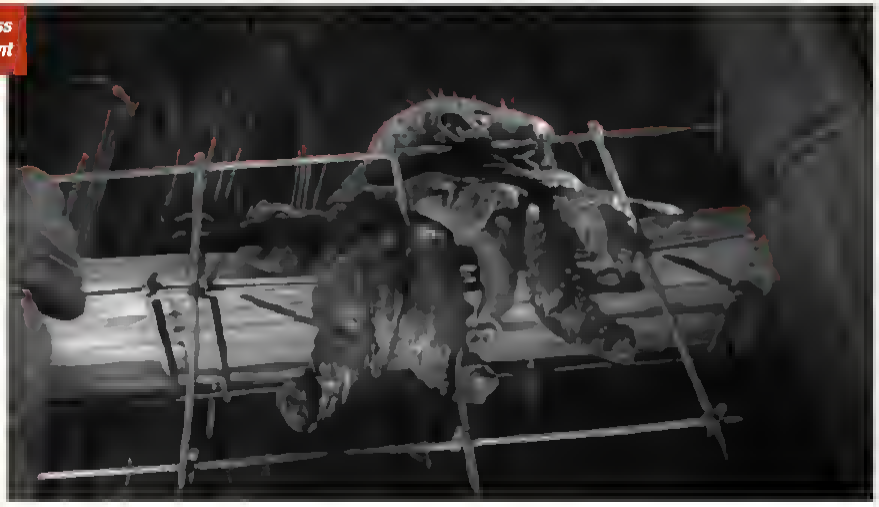
Nicky Henson (*Witchfinder General*) stars as Tom, the charming, sociopathic leader of a gang of fun-lovin' homicidal bikers known as The Living Dead. When he's through terrorizing the locals with a meaningless campaign of gas guzzling ultra-violence, he returns to his opulent country manor where his clairvoyant mother (Beryl Reid: *Dr. Phibes Rises Again*) and mysterious butler Shadwell (George Sanders: *Village of the Damned*) also reside.

When he demands to learn the truth about his dead father, his mother allows him into one of the mansion's perpetually locked rooms where he encounters a magical mirror that reveals the terrible secret – Tom is the son of Satan himself!

Recovering from the shock, he overhears his mother reveal to Shadwell the secret of everlasting life. Apparently, all you need to do is kill yourself with

Psychomania

The Quatermass Xperiment



the firm belief that you'll return from the dead. Not questioning the logic of this theory (why would you?), Tom initiates one of the gang's mad motorbike rampages and when the fuzz come to bust up the fun, he careens off the side of a bridge to his untimely demise.

After one of the most bizarre funerals in the history of motion pictures (he's buried sitting upright on his motorbike whilst a hippie plays a ballad on an acoustic guitar!), Tom bursts from the grave as an indestructible, undead zombie biker. The rest of the gang follow suit, each taking their lives with increasingly bizarre and hilarious methods. It's a mental mix of black magic, black leather, black humour and toad worship. Yes, toad worship!

Receiving little fanfare upon its initial release, *Psychomania*'s never received its proper due but it was the silent corruptor of British youth, one an entire generation has kept secret. Until now. **STUART F. ANDREWS**

THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT

1955/UK/82 MIN
STARRING BRIAN DONLEVY, JACK WARNER AND MARGIA DEAN
DIRECTED BY VAL GUEST

Before Hammer Films became one of the most influential film factories in the genre with its sexy *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* adaptations, the studio produced low-budget thrillers alongside cinematic adaptations of existing British television and radio programmes. Without a substantial success to Hammer's name, executives James Carreras and Anthony Hinds purchased the film rights for a play written by Nigel Kneale (*Professor Quatermass*), which culminated in the groundbreaking 1953 BBC series *The Quatermass Experiment* (directed by Rudolph Cartier).

In the series, Professor Bernard Quatermass' experimental manned rocket returns with only one crew member onboard. As he tries to unravel the mystery of the two missing astronauts, it becomes apparent that the survivor, Carroon (Richard Wordsworth in the series, Duncan Lamont in the film), is infected with an alien organism. Escaping from the hospital, Carroon steadily mutates into a monster, killing anyone who crosses its path. When the show aired, it caused a furor due to its intusion of horrific imagery into sci-fi narrative, with viewers responding in a BBC Audience Research Report that it was "tasteless," "unpleasant" and "harrowing" viewing.

In an attempt to replicate this response for the feature film version, Carreras requested that director Val Guest heighten the horrific elements of Kneale's story. Although the process of condensing a three-hour serial into a ninety-minute film meant that certain scenes had to be reduced or cut entirely, it also meant that the emphasis could be shifted onto Carroon's mutation. His transformation is graphic, with his arm mutating into a bloated, pulsating appendage, and the camera lingers upon the infection, as it does upon the deformed corpses of those he has killed. Guest balances this horror with the tragedy of Carroon's absorption, making him into a creature similar to Frankenstein's Monster – mute, deformed but painfully human.

Race With the Devil

Carreras' plan was to gain the dreaded X Certificate (Adults Only) from the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) and then exploit it through the misspelling of the film's title. The strategy worked and *The Quatermass Xperiment* was one of the first British films to receive the X Certificate. Nevertheless, it drew a large audience in Britain and in the United States, making *Xperiment* Hammer's first international success. **JAMES ROSE**

RACE WITH THE DEVIL

1975/USA/88 MIN
STARRING PETER FONDA, WARREN OATES AND LORETTA SWIT
DIRECTED BY JACK STARRETT

America's 1970s obsessions with car culture and devil worship collide in this film by Roger Corman school graduate, Jack Starrett. Peter Fonda and Warren Oates team up to play the patriarchs of families camping together in a huge RV who spot something they shouldn't have – an outdoor satanic mass, during which a virgin is sacrificed. Reports to the authorities don't do much as the cult runs far deeper than the shocked outsiders first realize, eventually sending them scrambling back to the vehicle to try to find a way out while the town's devil worshippers try to stop them from leaving at every turn.

Forget about subtext – the script by notorious exploitation vets Lee Frost and Wes Bishop is pure pulp thrills, a pedal-to-the-metal car-chase film with some of the most frightening stakes of the decade. Bursting with action, low-budget thrills, an engaging chemistry between the two tough-guy leads, *Race with the Devil* is in many ways the perfect drive-in piece – a movie whose ending surely had the couples who saw it on original release checking their rearview mirrors a little more often than usual on their way home. **PAUL CORUPE**

THE RAPE OF THE VAMPIRE

1968/FRANCE/100 MIN
STARRING SOLANGE PRADEL, BERNARD LETROU AND JACQUELINE SIEGER
DIRECTED BY JEAN ROLLIN

When it premiered in Paris in 1968, members of the audience were so infuriated with the nonsensical nature of Jean Rollin's debut, they actually threw objects at the screen. Without question, his films are an acquired taste, but if you're willing to wallow in those unique, cinematic obsessions, you may find yourself longing for his deserted beaches, crumbling manors, gothic cemeteries and gorgeous lesbian vampires in shimmery, see-through gowns.

Subtitled "a melodrama in two parts," *The Rape of the Vampire* (a.k.a. *The Grapes of Death*) is essentially

a two-part film with its own sequel embedded within. Steeped in the familiar trappings of gothic horror, the first part deals with a quartet of sisters living in a decaying chateau who believe themselves to be vampires. A trio of city slickers show up determined to cure the girls of their delusions, and thus begins a battle between old world superstition and modern, rational thought. The second part picks up immediately after the bloody finale of the first, then quickly devolves into a bugfuck spectacle of surrealist weirdness. We're introduced to a black Vampire Queen (Jacqueline Sieger) hell-bent on world domination and a scientist desperately trying to stop her ruthless campaign of ambiguous violence and pathological toplessness.

There's some wonky acting, wobbly action, woeful effects and a plot that's almost impossible to keep straight but it's all sustained by an infectious, youthful audacity. The black and white cinematography is gorgeous but as with much of Rollin's work, it fluctuates between beautifully composed shots and sloppy handheld camerawork. This is a movie that refuses to behave!

Rollin's first feature is an influential gateway to the European sex and horror films of the '70s where perverse, dreamlike imagery takes precedence over a coherent plot. If you demand that your horror films conform to a linear sequence of easily digested events, then think of this as a cinematic intervention, one that may liberate you from the prison of conventional narrative expectations. Or at the very least, take solace in the abundance of nubile female flesh that proliferates throughout. **STUART F. ANDREWS**

RAVENOUS

1999/USA/101 MIN
STARRING GUY PEARCE, ROBERT CARLYLE AND JEFFREY JONES
DIRECTED BY ANTONIA BIRD

If you're with the majority of moviegoers, it's likely you missed this gem during its all too brief theatrical run. But those of you in the know will probably agree that *Ravenous* was one of the best horror films of '99. Wickedly funny, often terrifying and wonderfully disgusting, *Ravenous* was the most subversive film to be released by a major studio in many a moon.

It tells the story of Colonel John Boyd (Guy Pearce), who is dispatched to the remote outpost of Fort Spencer, California after an act of cowardice inadvertently brands him a hero. It's not long before a bedraggled stranger named Colquhoun (Robert Carlyle) arrives, telling of a stranded wagon train in the mountains and the acts of cannibalism amongst the survivors. According to Colquhoun, some of them may still be alive, and this prompts Boyd and his detachment of soldiers to mount an expedition into the wilderness.

What ensues is a wildly unpredictable story that manages to inject some much-needed blood into a genre that had seen more of a swing to suggestive horror in the late-'90s rather than out-and-out gore. Filled with classic moments ("He's licking me!") and

The Rape of the Vampire

Ravenous

featuring oddball performances by Carlyle and veteran character actor Jeffrey Jones (*Beetlejuice*, *Ed Wood*), all set to a wonderfully oddball and unexpectedly whimsical soundtrack by Damon Albarn and Michael Nyman, *Ravenous* has "cult classic" written all over it ...in blood. BRAD ABRAHAM

RAW MEAT

1972/UK/87 MIN
STARRING DONALD PLEASENCE
NORMAN ROSSINGTON AND DAVID LADD
DIRECTED BY GARY SHERMAN

For daily commuters in London's underground, the phrase "mind the doors" is one that is heard so often that it barely registers in the conscious brain. Just before the train doors close prior to departing from every stop, the words come blaring over the speakers as a load of passengers make their way to the next station. In 1972, the gory British shocker *Raw Meat* (known in the UK as *Death Line*) turned the banal phrase into the stuff of nightmares.

When a well-known politician is snatched away in the subway by a hulking, disfigured cannibal, an investigation into the disappearance is launched by one Inspector Calhoun, played by an over-the-top Donald Pleasence (is there any other kind?). The volatile, abrasive inspector is joined by an American, his British girlfriend and eventually, a secret service agent, in a cameo role by Christopher Lee. They uncover the corpse-ridden den of the cannibals and determine that they are the last in a line of underground railroad workers cut off and abandoned after a tunnel collapse, who made do by eating one another and breeding amongst themselves. When the boil-ridden, baby-brained culprit is finally found, all he is able to say is "mind the doors."

Not only is *Raw Meat* unusually graphic for a British film from the early '70s, it's also the directorial debut of American filmmaker Gary Sherman, who would go on to direct the equally overlooked *Dead and Buried* (1981) and slimy cop-versus-crook tale *Vice Squad* (1982). The cannibalism on display is usually likened to the Italian cycle and American backwoods shockers, so for placing that kind of carnage in one of the world's most populated urban centres alone, *Raw Meat* is worth hunting down and sinking your teeth into. TAL ZIMERMAN

RAZORBACK

1984/AUSTRALIA/95 MIN
STARRING GREGORY HARRISON,
ARKIE WHITELEY AND BILL KERR
DIRECTED BY RUSSELL MULCAHY

If you were to set a killer animal flick in the Australian outback, what kind of beast would terrorize the locals? A dingo? Meh. A kangaroo? Nah. How about a wild boar? But not just any razorback... a giant, baby-eating, steam-panting, long-tusked monster. Now you've got yourself a movie!

The opening scene sets the unrelenting pace of the rest of the film. Kangaroo farmer Jake Cullen (Bill Kerr) puts his grandson to bed, then, seconds later, a large, unidentified creature crashes through the house, killing the baby. Flash forward a few years later, an American journalist travels to the area in an effort to expose the kangaroo slaughter but her efforts are thwarted by Dicko and Benny (David Argue and Chris Haywood), the twin owners of the Pet Pak Slaughterhouse. They attempt to rape her but run away when the titular monster appears and kills the doubly unlucky woman. When her husband travels to Australia and learns the truth of his wife's demise, he teams up with Cullen to destroy the beast.

Razorback was the feature debut of director Russell Mulcahy (*Highlander*, *Resident Evil: Extinction*). Already established as one of the most influential music video directors of the early MTV generation, he seamlessly transferred the shadowy, fog-ridden atmosphere of his work with Duran Duran into the horror genre. In *Razorback*, the daytime colours are rich yet filtered through the sun's haze, while in the night-time scenes many characters appear in silhouette against stylishly lit backdrops. Like in *Jaws*, technical problems restricted the razorback's mobility, resulting in quick cuts, but it only adds to the film's frenetic pace, placing it high on the plateau of the killer animal genre. A killer kangaroo flick would later be made, *Howling III: The Marsupials*, and let me tell you, it has nothing on *Razorback*. **ERIC VEILLETTE**

RED STATE

2011/USA/88 MIN
STARRING JOHN GOODMAN, MICHAEL PARKS AND KYLE GALLNER
DIRECTED BY KEVIN SMITH

"A parlour trick" is how Kevin Smith described his first foray into the horror genre. Perfect description because *Red State* only begins as a fright flick before morphing into an action siege movie with an apocalyptic bent. The director, who's known for his comedies, went the indie route with the $4 million film after the Weinstein Brothers rejected it for being too dark. American politics most likely played a role too, as you can guess by the title, this one's heavy on the social commentary.

At the heart of it is an ultra right-wing church, members of which lure three high school boys, including one played by Kyle Gallner (*A Nightmare on Elm Street* remake), into a trap with the promise of an orgy. The boys are brought back to the cult's compound, where its leader plans to make them his latest murderous example of what happens to heathens. Michael Parks (*From Dusk 'Til Dawn*, *Grindhouse*) plays the devoutly crazed preacher with a truly frightening fire 'n' brim-

Razorback

stone fervour, and deserved an Oscar nod for the role.

Before the kids can be executed, though, a local lawman gets too close and is killed by the sect, sparking a full-on siege. An anti-terrorism squad is called in, led by a jaded veteran played by John Goodman, and an exceptionally bloody – not to mention well-directed – shoot-out ensues with the kids trapped inside.

There's plenty of wry commentary on both religion and government failure, some hilarious dialogue and plenty of twists to send the plot careening into unexpected yet satisfying directions.

Red State is the most weighty and technically accomplished film under Smith's belt, and shows that he can spill blood and unleash villainy with the best of 'em. **DAVE ALEXANDER**

Red State

RED, WHITE & BLUE

2010/UK USA/104 MIN
STARRING AMANDA FULLER MARC SENTER AND JON MICHAEL DAVIS
DIRECTED BY SIMON RUMLEY

One need only look as far as the pages of *Rue Morgue* to see how contemporary movies such as *A Serbian Film*, *Enter the Void*, *A Horrible Way to Die* and even *The Human Centipede* are evolving the genre through tales that push the envelope in depicting appalling, often bizarre horrors committed by human monsters. British writer/director Simon Rumley is one purveyor of such strange, affecting cinema, and his fifth feature, *Red, White & Blue*, is a raw, hopeless shard of Americana that will not go down easy.

Using cross-cut editing for a fragmented, tense style of storytelling, and backed by an unsettling score, *Red, White & Blue* artfully recounts the intertwined story of Erica (Amanda Fuller), a damaged young woman who's engaged in a string of emotionless sexual encounters, Nate (Noah Taylor), a mysterious and soft-spoken ex-soldier who subscribes to the Charles Manson school of grooming, and an aspiring musician named Frankie (Marc Senter), whose mother is dying of cancer. Nate and Erica, who live in the same rooming house, find solace in each other's dark pasts and begin to grow close. Reluctant to let someone in, she continues to compulsively screw anyone who's interested, except Nate, who struggles to understand what drives her self-loathing. Eventually, Erica's darkest secret implicates Frankie and his mom in a twist best described as unthinkably heinous. The dizzying crescendo of violence that ensues climaxes in a two-and-a-half minute-long, extremely

Red, White & Blue

The Reflecting Skin

graphic beheading. Just one of the many ways this film will push you to the limit. TREVOR TUMINSKI

THE REFLECTING SKIN

1990/UK/95 MIN
STARRING VIGGO MORTENSEN, LINDSAY DUNCAN AND JEREMY COOPER
DIRECTED BY PHILIP RIDLEY

The line between prairie gothic and supernatural horror has never been as thin as it is in Philip Ridley's *The Reflecting Skin*. In fact, the 1990 film is – at least on one level – about those differences.

The permeable membrane between them is Seth Dove (Jeremy Cooper), a preteen boy growing up on the prairies, post-WWII, whose imagination morphs the real world horror around him into fantasy. When his friends go missing and turn up murdered, his father, who was apparently caught in the company of a boy in the past, is accused of the crimes. But before he can be charged, he douses himself in gas and lights himself on fire in front of his son, leaving Seth in the company of abusive, increasingly unhinged mother, Ruth (Sheila Moore). Elder son Cameron (Viggo Mortensen) is given leave from the army and arrives back home, where he falls in love with a widower named Dolphin (Lindsay Duncan), who Seth believes is really a vampire. When Cameron starts coughing up blood due to radiation exposure overseas, it only seems to confirm Seth's suspicions. As the boy tries to sabotage their relationship, a big black Cadillac full of predatory greasers circles the backroads ever closer, like a shark honing in on its latest prey.

The Reflecting Skin presents a grotesque, dangerous world defined by its intense characters and strange visuals. For example, when Seth finds a mummified fetus in a barn, he believes it's an angel and hides it in a box under his bed so he can talk to it at night!

Is it because writer/director Philip Ridley (*The Krays*, *Heartless*) is from Britain that he could so operatically reimage the pastoral heartland of Idaho (Alberta standing in for it, anyhow) as such an alien, sinister place? (After all, only Terry Gilliam's wonky *Tideland* comes close to capturing the feel of this film.) Regardless, it's a goddamn shame that the only North American DVD release of Ridley's masterwork is a poorly transferred, fullscreen, barebones abomination. DAVE ALEXANDER

REIGN OF FIRE

2002/IRELAND/UK/USA/101 MIN
STARRING CHRISTIAN BALE, MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY AND IZABELLA SCORUPCO
DIRECTED BY ROB BOWMAN

Consider yourself forgiven if you initially passed over *Reign of Fire* because it sounds like something thought up by a bunch of drunk nerds debating who would win in a fight between the a militia and a dragon. But look beyond this admittedly ludicrous premise and you'll find a surprisingly entertaining, completely unique monster movie/apocalypse film.

After an opening that reveals how the dragons escaped the earth (during the construction of a tube tunnel in London), we're jetted ahead to 2020. Most of the globe has been reduced to smouldering rubble,

Reign of Fire

due to flying dragons that reproduce like rabbits and destroy everything in sight. Only a few hold-outs of humanity remain, including one group holed up in a dilapidated castle. Led by Quinn (Christian Bale), the enclave's biggest problem is keeping itself hidden from the fire-breathers and getting enough to eat, at least until American "Dragon Slayer" Van Zan (Matthew McConaughey) shows up with his troops, tanks and 'copter, insisting he knows how to defeat the beasts once and for all. The two men clash ideologically, but after both sides suffer massive losses, they join forces to take the fight back to London – and the sole alpha male.

Much could have gone wrong with this film in the hands of lesser actors and SFX artists; it could have been outright straight-to-cable laughable, and the fact that it isn't – *at all* – says something. Director Rob Bowman and company approach the oddball premise with the utmost seriousness and the payoff is huge, from the Best Visual Effects award it won at the Sitges International Film Festival in 2002 to the fact that ten years after its release it still holds up incredibly well, even if it did sputter at the box office. We already know not to judge books by their covers, but *Reign of Fire* teaches us we really shouldn't judge films by their synopses either. MONICA S. BUEBLER

RIGHT AT YOUR DOOR

2006/US/96 MIN
STARRING RORY COCHRANE, MARY MCCORMACK AND TONY PEREZ
DIRECTED BY CHRIS GORAK

When disaster movies strive for realism, such as the nuclear Armageddon films *The Day After* or BBC telefilm *Threads*, they become truly terrifying. And the very realistic and contemporary *Right at Your Door* is as terrifying as it gets.

Rory Cochrane plays Brad, a musician who's just moved to the L.A. suburbs with his wife Lexi (Mary McCormack). Shortly after he sees her off to work, a series of "dirty" bombs explode throughout the city, causing mass casualties and widespread panic. Frantically trying to find his wife, Brad soon realizes there's no way out of the city, so he hits the hardware store for supplies and seals himself inside his house, along with the neighbour's handyman Alvaro (Tony Perez), who begs for shelter. As Brad frantically awaits Lexi's return, men in hazmat suits start rounding up people in the streets, forcing Brad into a series of painful decisions.

Like the sinister white ash that settles on the landscape, a sickly tension blankets this film. Death is in the air and Brad is faced with the kind of choices that constantly ratchet up the paranoia. Shot on video, with minimal cast members and effects, *Right at Your Door* places the viewer in the centre of his nightmare and offers just enough glimpses of the outside world to suggest Doomsday on a bad day's budget.

Before embarking on this first feature, director Chris Gorak was art director on an impressive list of films, including *Tombstone*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Fight Club* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*. Here, he shows a lot of shoestring creativity in a movie that'll scare you more than any torture dungeon gore show. DAVE ALEXANDER

RIKI-OH: THE STORY OF RICKY

1991/HONG KONG/JAPAN/91 MIN
STARRING FAN SIU-WONG, FAN MEI SHENG AND KA KUI HO
DIRECTED BY NGAI CHOI LAM

If you want to experience a 90-minute WTF moment, look no further than *Riki-Oh: The Story of Ricky*. Best described as a martial arts film directed by Peter Jackson, it sports some of the most over-the-top gore scenes of all time, as well as hilariously bad melodrama and atrocious dubbing. All the more fun!

Based on the manga *Riki-Oh*, about a super-strong martial artist trained in the art of Qigong, this Hong

Kong adaptation is set in a prison where our titular hero is serving a sentence for the murder of the crime lord who was indirectly responsible for his girlfriend's death. Inside, he becomes the enemy of the so-called Gang of Four, who control the various cell blocks and use the prison to grow opium.

Much, much, much violent insanity ensues, with the money shot coming in a fight scene where a prisoner slashes Ricky's arm, only to have the protagonist tie his tendons back together with his teeth and other hand so he can resume the fight! But that's not all, Ricky slaps the prisoner in the back of the head so hard his eyeballs pop out, which are then eaten by crows. Realizing he's not going to win, the prisoner commits suicide by slicing his stomach open, then tries to strangle Ricky with his intestines.

The film's bloody climax rivals the lawnmower scene in *Dead Alive*, but ends with something even more ridiculous: Ricky punches right through the prison wall, freeing himself and the other prisoners. Why didn't he do that in beginning? Who cares! Once you give yourself over to *Riki-Oh*'s insanity, you sure as hell won't. **AARON VON LUPTON**

RITUALS

1977/CANADA/100 MIN
STARRING HAL HOLBROOK, LAWRENCE DANE AND ROBIN GAMMELL
DIRECTED BY PETER CARTER

Canadian horror during the '70s may be best remembered for the films of David Cronenberg, but this country was also responsible for two of the most unsettling horror films ever: *Black Christmas* and this overlooked classic.

Five doctors take turns arranging a secret annual vacation, and this year it's a fly-in fishing trip to the Cauldron of the Moon, a remote river area in northern Ontario. After a night of carousing, they discover their boots have been stolen. The only doctor with an extra pair of shoes volunteers to hike to a distant hydro dam for help. Left alone, the remaining men awaken the second night to discover the decapitated head of a deer hanging from a tree. Unnerved, they decide to make their own way to the dam. An unseen stalker follows, cutting a beehive from a tree, forcing the men to blindly flee from the angry insects. In the ensuing panic one of them doesn't make it to the safety of the nearby river, his neck snapped.

The remaining three press on, their internal and outward conflicts exacerbated by their plight. While crossing a section of river, one of the men steps in a bear trap, his leg broken, their hopes dashed anew. The two remaining doctors struggle on, dragging their comatose, stretcher-bound companion through an otherworldly, forest-fire ravaged landscape. They finally reach the dam, and only then begin their ultimate battle for survival.

Rituals, made in 1977, comes after *Deliverance* (1972) but predates *Friday the 13th* and the slasher boom of the early '80s. Instead of casting cheesecake thirtysomething "teens" and killing them off after titillating softcore porn scenes, *Rituals* features grown men with individual insecurities and emotional baggage despairing in the face of irrationality and utter madness. The gruelling climax puts forth the hypothesis that despite all the education and socialization we as a species aspire to, the deepest depths of a man's soul is rooted in primordial savagery. **THE GORE-MET**

ROAD GAMES

1981/AUSTRALIA/101 MIN
STARRING STACY KEACH, JAMIE LEE CURTIS AND MARION EDWARD
DIRECTED BY RICHARD FRANKLIN

There's a killer on the roads of the Australian Outback and Quid (Stacy Keach), an American truck driver, has it in his mind to catch him. This is the basic premise behind *Road Games*, Richard Franklin's well-crafted and criminally underrated thriller. When Quid keeps crossing paths with a mysterious green van in his travels, he begins to see clues that its driver might be the one responsible for the dis-

Road Games

appearances of young female hitchhikers. Accompanied by a hitchhiker named Pamela (Jamie Lee Curtis), he sets out to get at the truth. As a cat-and-mouse game plays out on the highway, the tension builds and the plot twists and turns making us think that, just maybe, all is not what it seems.

Marketed in the US as a slasher film (viewed by many as an attempt to cash in on Curtis' involvement), the movie is actually a tightly-constructed and beautifully-shot thriller that plays like the one of the best Hitchcock films not made by Hitchcock. (Franklin himself called it "*Rear Window* in a truck.") The pace is deliberate and methodical, teasing out the mystery in small doses with plenty of red herrings. And even the score by Brian May pays homage to Hitchcock's longtime collaborator, Bernard Herrmann.

Part of *Road Games*' strength also lies in the chemistry between its leads. Keach is effortlessly cool as the rugged and charming Quid, while Curtis alluring and tough as Pamela. Together they have a natural rapport that plays like something from a Howard Hawks film.

The movie has also left its imprint in such works as *The Hitcher* and *Wolf Creek* (director Greg Mclean acknowledges it as an influence in the Ozploitation doc *Not Quite Hollywood*). It is also cited by Quentin Tarantino as one of the best films to ever come out of Australia. While hard-to-find and out of print in North America, it's a taut, well-crafted thriller that's worth tracking down. **RON MCKENZIE**

ROGUE

2007/AUSTRALIA/99 MIN
STARRING RADHA MITCHELL, MICHAEL VARTAN AND SAM WORTHINGTON
DIRECTED BY GREG MCLEAN

Some directors were born to reinvent the horror film, while others, such as Australia's Greg Mclean, are content to simply reinvigorate it. Between his 2005 feature debut *Wolf Creek* and his 2007 effort *Rogue*, McLean has proven himself extraordinarily adept at breathing new life into tired old subgenres (survivalist/hillbilly horror and nature-run-amok, respectively).

Normally I'd balk at yet another crocodile movie, but I find this one irresistible despite its rote storyline and stock characters. Radha Mitchell plays Kate, a.k.a. The World's Most Beautiful Yet Tough and Resourceful Wilderness Tour Guide, who takes a riverboat full of Aussie and American tourists out croc-spotting on a three-hour tour ("a three-hour toooour...")

Crocs are spotted, pics snapped, tiles swatted, heat complained about and then it's time to head for home, but wait – two emergency flares are suddenly seen in the sky. Kate dutifully steers her grumbling passengers to a remote part of the river, and before you can say "crikey," they're stranded on a tiny island, getting

Rogue

Rubber

munched one at a time.

Following as *Rogue* does on the heels of the excruciatingly brutal *Wolf Creek*, did Mclean make this film specifically to keep from being typed as a Tobe Hooper wannabe? Only he knows for sure. He certainly doesn't flinch in the face of major croc carnage, but if you're expecting *Rogue* to match its predecessor's violence and nihilism, well, don't – it's an entirely different story, and Mclean wisely approaches it that way.

There's no disputing this fundamental truth about horror films and horror fans: it doesn't have to be original. It just has to be good. And *Rogue*, while far from original, is very good indeed. JOHN W BOWEN

RUBBER

2010/FRANCE ANGOLA/82 MIN
STARRING STEPHEN SPINELLA, JACK PLOTNICK AND ROXANE MESQUIDA
DIRECTED BY QUENTIN DUPIEUX

To label *Rubber* as merely an unconventional horror film would be an unfortunate understatement. Even in a genre populated with *RoboGeisha*, *Sharktopus* and *Killer Condom*, this absurdist horror-comedy by Quentin Dupieux (a.k.a. French electronic musician Mr. Oizo) follows a very strange anti-hero: a killer tire. But the clever film is also a commentary on the different ways audiences interact with movies and the many expectations we hold as horror fans.

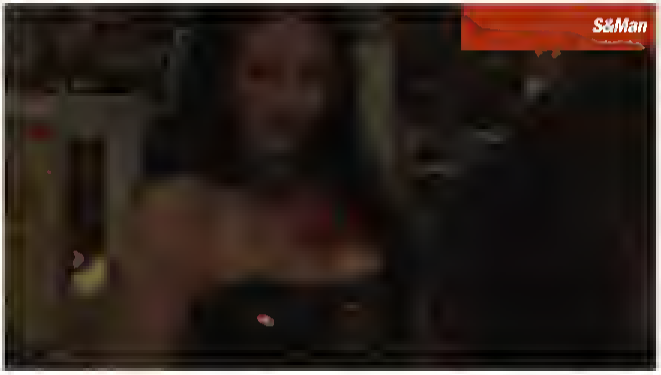
As Lieutenant Chad (Stephen Spinella, *Ravenous*) demonstrates in the opening monologue, *Rubber* is meant as an homage to "no reason." ("Why is E.T. brown? Why did the characters in *Love Story* fall in love? No reason.") This starts to make more sense as two parallel plots unfold. In the first, we have our killer tire, Robert, who wakes up on the side of the road (for no reason) and decides that he enjoys crushing things. This killer tire plot progresses surprisingly naturally; Robert meets a bottle he cannot crush, he gets frustrated and discovers he can blow it up with his "mind." From there, killing birds and bunnies eventually escalates into exploding people in a *Scanners*-inspired manner. In the second plot line, we have a parallel story played out by "the spectators" – an audience within the movie that provides narrative, commentary and comic relief while watching Robert's antics via binoculars from afar.

Relying heavily on genre conventions (behind-the-shoulder shots and motel murder scenes, among them), Dupieux makes the killer tire "work" as a serial killer, drawing attention to what we've come to know about horror standards. However, each time Robert's plot gets too involved, the actors break out of their roles to inform the audience that they're indeed watching a movie. And as soon as the film goes too far into one of its philosophical tangents (upon finding a mirror, Robert has an existential crisis) Dupieux throws in a gag, reminding you not to take things too seriously. Shot with some crafty camerawork, this low-budget indie flick is easy on the eyes, with some very effective gore-gags to boot. JESSA SOBCZUK

S&MAN

2006/USA/84 MIN
STARRING ELIZABETH CARTIER, CAROL J. CLOVER AND DEBBIE D.
DIRECTED BY JT PETTY

The chilling escalation from voyeurism to rape, murder and snuff is at the foundation of *S&Man*, JT Petty's mockumentary (in which some of the subjects believe they're in an actual documentary) exploration of the connection between voyeurism and extreme horror films. He explains in the



S&Man

constructed edit of Vogel listing a litany of repugnant acts in *August Underground's Mordum*, which he ends with the statement, "You won't find this in Blockbuster." In Petty's manipulation of the interview footage, Vogel gets off lightly, but that was not the case with all the participants. Required viewing.

THE GORE-METER

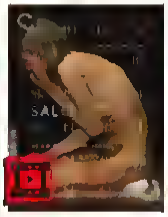
beginning of the film that he had intended to make a documentary about a prolific neighbourhood voyeur from his childhood, but when his subject declined to appear on camera he turned his attention to underground horror. Petty's principal interview subjects are scream queen Debbie D and filmmakers Bill Zebub, Fred Vogel and Eric Rost, as well as Professor Carol Clover (author of the highly influential book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*), and psychologists Meg Kaplan and Richard Krueger.

The premise finds Petty perturbed by Rost's *S&Man* series, each episode of which features a woman being surreptitiously stalked and murdered – and Rost is evasive and hostile when asked about his filmmaking process, to the point where it becomes apparent that maybe he isn't taking the snuff.

Labelling this a mockumentary is actually a bit disingenuous. Except for the Eric Rost segments – which are fictional – this is for all intents and purposes a legitimate documentary. One of the most entertaining segments in the film is a carefully

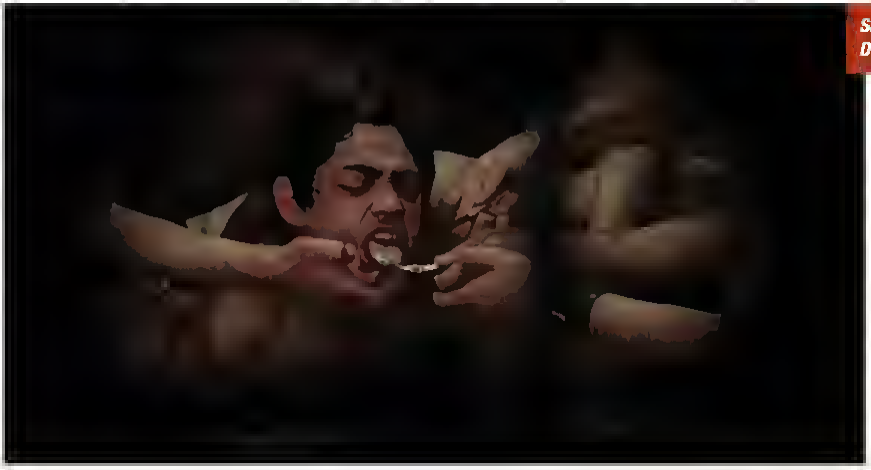
SALÒ, OR THE 120 DAYS OF SODOM

1975/ITALY,FRANCE/116 MIN
STARRING PAOLO BONACELLI, GIORGIO CATALDI AND UMBERTO P. QUINTAVALLE
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY PIER PAOLO PASOLINI



Decades before *Human Centipede*, there was *Salò*. Still banned in many countries, Pier Paolo Pasolini's film is often regarded as sickeningly perverse pornography and one of the most violent films ever committed to celluloid. Make no mistake, it's as disturbing as its reputation.

Pasolini based *Salò* on the Marquis de Sade's treatise on sadism, *120 Days of Sodom*. Written almost 200 years earlier, while de Sade was imprisoned in the Bastille, the text is little more than a catalogue of sado-masochist



Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom

Santa Sangre

fetish and sexual torture. Pasolini updates the novel by setting his film in the Italian Republic of Salò in 1944, near the decline of fascism. The story – which had uncredited script contributions from *Arcane Sorcerer* director Pupi Avati – focuses on the exploits of four libertine fascists (including Paolo Bonacelli from *The Stendhal Syndrome*) who kidnap children to satisfy their sadistic fantasies. The men enlist two seasoned prostitutes to aide and entertain them with stories, fuelled by the evening's tales of sexual degradation, the men partake in rape, sodomy, incest, coprophilia, ritualistic mutilations and, finally, murder.

Watching *Salò* is to swim in the vile murk of the darkest of humanity's obsessions. Yet, it's not torture porn, nor is it exploitation. Rather, it's a beautifully photographed work that's thick with metaphor and allegory about fascism and political corruption.

The fact that Pasolini was murdered shortly after the film's release, gives it that much more of a dangerous edge. JASON PICHONSKY

SANTA SANGRE

1989/MEXICO ITALY/123 MIN
STARRING AXEL JODOROWSKY, BLANCA GUERRA AND THELMA TIXOU
DIRECTED BY ALEJANDRO JODOROWSKY

Imagine an Italian *giallo* with all the extreme violence and sexual perversion cranked up to eleven and funnelled through director Alejandro Jodorowsky's metaphysical, socio-political, surrealist genius, and shot on the streets of Mexico City amidst a cavalcade of real-life street musicians, circus freaks, drunks, prostitutes and the physically deformed. In fact, *Santa Sangre* is even weirder than that.

Jodorowsky's 1989 magnum opus stars his son Adan as Fenix, a young circus magician who's developed an unhealthy sexual attraction to his mother (a Mexican trapeze artist played by the beautiful Blanca Guerra). When the jealous matriarch catches his abusive father (an obese American knife-thrower played by Guy Stockwell) cavorting with the voluptuous tattooed lady (Thelma Tixou), she throws a bottle of hydrochloric acid into his gonads. He retaliates by savagely cutting off both her arms and then severs his own throat, falling to his death while street dogs lap at his blood.

Young Fenix witnesses the entire incident and goes mad. Ten years later, he breaks out of an insane asylum (the older Fenix is played by another of Jodorowsky's sons, Axel) to reconnect with his mother and effectively become her "arms." Together, they create a bizarre cabaret act wherein she performs hand pantomimes while he stays glued to her back, moving his hands to her every gesture. But her jealous, domineering love for Fenix is so strong that when any woman comes near him, she forces him to dispatch them ruthlessly. It's like Norman Bates on LSD.

Although most renowned for *El Topo*, his 1970 surrealist western, *Santa Sangre* is Jodorowsky's most accomplished film. It possesses all of his trademark obsessions but plunders a range of agonizing emotional states only hinted at in his previous work.

STUART F ANDREWS

THE SENTINEL

1977/USA/92 MIN
STARRING CRISTINA RAINES, CHRIS SARANDON AND BURGESS MEREDITH
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL WINNER

When you think of American "devil" movies from the '70s, *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* are the undisputed heavyweight champions. But don't underestimate *The Sentinel*'s chances to get in a few lucky sucker punches either.

With an unbelievable ensemble cast, one can only gawk as each legendary character actor pops up on the screen; however, it's Cristina Raines who takes centre stage as New York fashion model Alison Parker. After moving into a fancy apartment in Brooklyn Heights, she quickly learns that her neighbours are a serious bunch of

The Sentinel

wackjobs. On the top floor, there's the blind Father Halliran (John Carradine) who spends all day sitting in a chair staring blankly out the window. On the ground floor, there's the aging lesbian ballerina Gerde Engstrom (Sylvia Miles) and her mute, compulsively masturbating concubine Sandra (Beverly D'Angelo). And somewhere in between lives Charles Chazen (Burgess Meredith), a "mad as a hatter" eccentric who throws surprise birthday parties for his cat.

Growing tired of the constant racket in the building, Alison complains to property manager Miss Logan (Ava Gardner) only to learn that with the exception of Father Halliran, no-one has lived in there for years. As Detective Gatz (Eli Wallach) investigates, we soon discover that the blind priest sitting in the window may very well be guarding a veritable gateway to Hell.

The Fulci comparisons are inevitable, but infamously demented director Michael Winner (the first three *Death Wish* movies) hits moments as berserk as anything the Italian gore peddler ever devised. When the doors to Hell burst open, a torrent of demonic characters is unleashed that has to be seen to be believed. It's one of the most jarring sequences ever devised for a horror movie, especially with the employment of real-life "freaks" as inter-dimensional devils. Pinhead's got nothing on these real-life pinheads! *The Sentinel* is required viewing for addicts of deranged cinema everywhere. STUART F. ANDREWS

A SERBIAN FILM

2010/SERBIA/104 MIN
STARRING SRDJAN TODOROVIC
SERGEJ TRIFUNOVIC AND JELENA GAVRILOVIC
DIRECTED BY SRDJAN SPASOJEVIC

The verdict is still out on whether *A Serbian Film* is a vile piece of gruesome exploitation or a valid artistic expression of a decidedly extreme experience – or, whether it can be both. Various comparisons have been made to films ranging from rough snuff re-enactments in the vein of the *August Underground* series, to more polished but still graphic genre outings like *Martyrs*, all the way to the respected art house classics such as Pasolini's *Salo 120 Days of Sodom* or Gaspar Noe's *Irreversible*. Whatever the case, critics agree that no other recent work has shocked, provoked, disgusted and angered as many audiences – resulting in censorship and death threats against its director.

A Serbian Film

10 FRIGHTFESTS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY NEED TO SEE

BY PAUL COUNELIS AND APRIL SNELLINGS

The Monster Squad

ARACHNOPHOBIA

1990/USA 103 MIN

Long-time Steven Spielberg collaborator Frank Marshall made his directorial debut with this valentine to vintage creature features, which finds a deadly Venezuelan spider stowing away in a US-bound coffin. Once it's stateside, the amorous arachnid gets it on with a house spider, and a California town is soon besieged by the pair's deadly offspring. Sans gore but full of ingenious practical effects, *Arachnophobia* is old-fashioned skin-crawling fun.

THE BAD SEED

1956/USA 129 MIN

This dark, edgy tale stars Nancy Kelly as a housewife who realizes her pigtailed, tap-dancing little girl (Patty McCormack) is a cold-blooded murderer. Kelly, McCormack and co-star Eileen Heckart all received Academy Award nominations for their performances, making *The Bad Seed* one of the few horror films to earn multiple Oscar nods. The closing credit sequence, which sees the tiny terror get a thoroughly '50s-style comeuppance, is one of the strangest in cinematic history.

CORALINE

2009/USA/100 MIN

Based on Neil Gaiman's chilling children's novella, *Coraline* follows its title character into a bizarre alternate dimension ruled by her Other Mother, a terrifying version of her real-life mom. Other Mother is perfectly happy to make Coraline the centre of her world, but the attention comes with a gruesome price. Directed by Henry Selick (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*), *Coraline* is a gorgeous, fantastically creepy stop-motion masterpiece.

THE GATE

1987/CANADA/85 MIN

Along with *The Monster Squad*, *The Gate* is one of two great family horror films released in 1987, though it relies less on comedy and more on a heightened sense of spookiness. Two friends (one of whom is played by Stephen Dorff, in his first movie) accidentally open a gateway to a hellish dimension in their backyard, and now they've got to save the world from the demons that are pouring through it. Genuine scares but a real sense of fun and some stop-motion critters make this perfect for older kids.

THE HOLE

2009/USA/92 MIN

Gremlins director Joe Dante made his long-awaited return to kid-friendly horror with this tale of two brothers who find a padlocked trapdoor in the basement of their family's new home. When they open the mysterious hatch, they soon find that their worst fears are being re-

alized. Things are bad enough when the boys and their next-door neighbour are besieged by ghosts and killer puppets, but the hole has something even more terrifying in store for them when it spits out a monster from the boys' past. A punchy PG treat.

THE MONSTER SQUAD

1987/USA/82 MIN

Fred Dekker's comedic clash of classic monsters is a perfect bridge from milder, *Scooby-Doo*-type material, to horror fare with a bit more sophistication (but only a bit – the fun stuff stays). *The Monster Squad*, which pits a group of kids against a band of monsters led by Dracula himself, is entertaining from start to finish, featuring updates of the Universal Monsters, a great cast of kids kicking butt *Goonies*-style and memorable one-liners ("Wolfman's got nards!").

MR. BOOGEDY

1986/USA/44 MIN

Mr. Boogedy made its debut in 1986 as an installment of *The Disney Sunday Movie* series, and was popular enough to warrant a sequel, *Bride of Boogedy*, the following year. The action takes place around a family that moves into a house in New England, only to discover that it's haunted by a colonial period ghost. For monster kids of a certain age, the movie was an instant classic, featuring just the right mix of laughs and low-grade chills. Its most memorable image – glowing green footsteps going up a wall – packs an eerie punch to this day. Bonus: John Astin from the original *Addams Family* co-stars.

The Witches

PARANORMAN

2012/USA/92 MIN

ParaNorman returned only modest box-office receipts despite a big marketing push, but it is the perfect family frightfest, full of zombies, witches and ghosts. Combining stunning 3-D animation with humour, a few scary moments and a heap of heart, it's just spooky enough to appeal to adults and children alike, as it tells the tale of a bullied kid who can see and (speak with) the deceased desperately trying to save his town from an old curse.

THE WATCHER IN THE WOODS

1980/USA,UK/84 MIN

Inspired by the supernatural horrors that dominated the box office in the 1970s, Disney made a brief but memorable sojourn into the dark with films such as *The Watcher in the Woods* and 1983's terrific *Something Wicked this Way Comes*. *Watcher* is marginally the scarier of the two, and centres on an American family that moves into a rural British manor, only to become embroiled in the decades-old disappearance of a local girl. Disney famously decided the original ending was too scary and replaced it with a milder version, but the film has nonetheless freaked out two generations and counting.

THE WITCHES

1990/USA/91 MIN

Roald Dahl (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*) penned *The Witches*, an atmospheric, creepy tale of a group of sorceresses who want to rid the world of children. The catch is that the one person who knows about the plan is a young orphan boy that the witches have turned into a mouse. Like Dahl's book, the film adaptation is somewhat dark and very entertaining, with a memorable turn by Anjelica Huston as the Grand High Witch. This is solid storytelling for all ages.

THE SENDER

1982/UK/91 MIN
STARRING KATHRYN HARROLD, ZELJKO IVANEK AND SHIRLEY KNIGHT
DIRECTED BY ROGER CHRISTIAN

Roger Christian's *The Sender* may be the most undeservedly ignored horror film of 1982 – quite possibly of the entire decade in which it was made. In reaching back for the influence of Alfred Hitchcock, Roman Polanski and Claude Chabrol, this beautifully crafted chiller is that rare thing in gimmick-ridden '80s horror cinema – a solemn, subtle, slow-burning movie that exhibits none of the fatigue that afflicts many of its more homogenized contemporary offerings.

After collecting two Oscars (the first for Best Set Decoration on *Star Wars*, the second for his 1981 short film, *The Dollar Bottom*), Christian was ready to embark on his first feature-length movie as director. Receiving the script for *The Sender* from producer Edward S. Feldman, Christian responded to the story of a suicidal amnesiac (Zeljko Ivanek) who is admitted to a psychiatric hospital and labelled John Doe #83. After quickly establishing a telepathic link to his psychiatrist, Dr. Farmer (Kathryn Harrold), Doe (the titular "Sender") causes her to experience terrifying and violent hallucinations. Dr. Farmer becomes increasingly convinced that Doe's relationship with his mysterious mother (Shirley Knight) holds the key to the roots of his trauma, and discovers a world where the lines between reality and nightmares are indivisible.

Graced with formidable performances, a haunting score and pleasingly atmospheric photography from Roger Pratt, these attributes were not enough to rescue *The Sender* from virtual obscurity as it vanished from theatres as suddenly as it had arrived. However, over the last 30 years Christian's assured debut has amassed a small but loyal cult following – and it just happens to be one of Quentin Tarantino's favourite movies!

Rue Morgue recently caught up with Roger Christian and returned to *The Sender*.

***In depicting the relationship between a religious-fanatic mother and her psychic child, am I right in assuming that* Carrie *was an influence on* The Sender?**

I actually asked the writer Thomas Baum about this and he said the script all came from him, and was a true story. He had a strange relationship with his mother, and they communicated with each other for the first six or seven years of his life by telepathy. The term "sending" is actually a medical term and it's the transmission that really does exist between a newborn baby and its mother. It's a two-way thing that apparently disappears within six months but there is definitely a psychological connection between parent and child.

The vogue during the early 1980s was the overuse of makeup effects, which you mostly eschewed in favour of a measured atmosphere of dread.

That was Ridley Scott's influence there because I loved the way that *Alien* was made. I was on the set of that film all the time and could observe the way that Ridley was building up the tension. That approach worked beautifully and I felt it was the path I should also take with *The Sender*. Roger Pratt and I worked closely to carefully time the film all the way along and give it this strange atmosphere.

The Sender

Shirley Knight is a haunting presence as Doc's mother.

She really is. I met Alan Pakula and he actually hugged me and said, "Thank you for giving Shirley a job because this woman is one of our greatest actresses and is far too rarely seen on screen." She was amazing and that combination with Zeljko was great. Roger and I always lit her differently with a slightly colder light. We did it so subtly that psychologically you don't always notice it, but it's there, and by the end of the film you begin to notice that something is very wrong about her. Shirley gives a chilling performance but I do remember that she could only give me a certain number of takes because it was so emotional for her.

It is subtly implied that the relationship between mother and son is incestuous. Would you agree?

That was there in Thomas' writing and you never give obvious clues to it, but above Shirley's bed when she is trying to talk her son into suicide, there is a Pre-Raphaelite painting, and it's Ophelia in the reeds, floating. So there is a real warped romantic feel we brought to it because it's love gone very wrong.

The enigmatic ending, where Doc is reunited with his dead mother, has aroused much debate and confusion. What's your take on it?

I felt it was such a powerful relationship that at the end of the day the Sender was very smart, and knew exactly what he had to do to get out of that facility. He said he was cured and the doctors believed he was, but that kind of passionate connection between mother and son wasn't something that was going to be eradicated like that. When Doc leaves he is still seeing his mother and she has become this presence that is ongoing with him.

Did you cut any interesting scenes?

There was originally a different ending. We were to see Doc standing at the hospital window looking out, watching himself leave the facility. We felt that ending didn't work because it wasn't a resolution. Thomas had always written it so that Doc had fooled everybody, but we thought the mother had to be there at the end because it was really the driving force of the film. I thought the unused ending was even more confusing!

MICHAEL BOYLE

Trying to break the boundaries between genre and art, exploitation and statement, film and reality, newcomer Srdjan Spasojevic's debut feature is a devastating sado-masochistic descent into darkness. Srdjan Todorovic stars as Milos, an ex-porn star who accepts one last job in a shady but well-paid "art-porn" production, in order to earn enough so he can leave the country with his wife and child. As the production becomes increasing strange and violent, he decides to quit, but there is no escape, he's drugged and forced to participate in a series of escalating, gore-soaked atrocities – including assault, rape and murder – that eventually involve his family.

Though the plot is simple and the acts depicted are sickeningly graphic, this is only the shocking surface of a complex work. Ultra violent, pornographic and psychologically crushing – steel yourself for *A Serbian Film*. **DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ**

SESSION 9

2001/USA/96 MIN
STARRING DAVID CARUSO, PETER MULLAN AND JOSH LUCAS
DIRECTED BY BRAD ANDERSON

"Fear is a place" warned the ads for *Session 9*, and if there was one location where disquiet and misery had seeped into the bricks and mortar it would have surely been the Danvers State Hospital in Massachusetts, where this refined creepfest was lensed. Built in 1874 and demolished in 2006, it was rumoured to be the institution where the prefrontal lobotomy was "perfected," and several cast members have acknowledged that its oppressive atmosphere and history affected them during shooting.

The story revolves around a small blue-collar crew led by Gordon (Peter Mullan) and Phil (David Caruso) who are hired to clear asbestos from a derelict asylum. Each of the five men in the company is haunted by his own personal demons and private fears that are exacerbated when Mike (co-writer Stephen Gevedon) plays an old tape recording of a psychiatrist's interview with a murderess suffering from multiple personality disorder.

Shot on 24P high-definition video and transferred to 35mm, the film is imbued with a naturalistic look that effectively utilises natural light (and darkness). Anderson's use of captions and tracking shots through empty corridors echoes *The Shining*, and

he plunders that same well of despair and isolation. The score and sound design are excellent, and the literate screenplay boasts several dialogue scenes that rival *The Exorcist III* in prickling one's flesh with gooseburnps.

Session 9 cleverly plays with the ambiguity of its haunting, and as a subtle exploration of germinating madness, deals with the destructive pressures of familial stress and the disenchantments of middle-age. A box-office disappointment in 2001, *Session 9* is now regarded as a superior exercise in skin-crawling psychological horror. **MICHAEL DOYLE**

SHEITAN

2006/FRANCE/94 MIN
STARRING VINCENT CASSEL
OLIVIER BARTHELEMY AND ROXANE MESQUIDA
DIRECTED BY KIM CHAPIRON

The naive-city-folk-versus-sinister-country-bumpkins theme is a well-established horror convention, from *Deliverance* to *Wrong Turn*, urban dwellers have been defiled, abused, raped and mutilated on film by their rural brethren. *Sheitan*, an insane first feature from director-writer Kim Chapiron, a member of the French art collective Kourtrajme, offers a Gallic twist on the genre. Consider it a hipper, funnier cousin to Fabrice Du Welz's *Calvaire*.

Vincent Cassel (*Irreversible*, *Brotherhood of the Wolf*) produced the film and stars as Joseph, a dentally challenged caretaker at a country estate whose maniacal grin hides a multitude of demonic sins. His charges this particular weekend are Bart (Olivier Barthelemy), Thai (Nicolas Le Phat Tan), Lady (Lady Li) and Yasmine (Leila Bekthi) – multicultural club kids from Paris who find the countryside terribly amusing. Their escort is the sexy Eve (Roxane Mesquida), a seductress whose sophistication hooks the boys into a weekend adventure they will never forget.

Chapiron expertly ratchets up the tension; we know something bad is going to happen, but we're not sure what until close to the end. Cassel's sinister aims are hidden beneath a simple-minded charm and racist bluster, so when he finally reveals his plans (think *Rosemary's Baby*), it's not exactly a surprise, but it is a powerful moment.

Sheitan is a stylish, solid trip that just make you never go on a road trip ever again. **SEAN PLUMMER**

SH! THE OCTOPUS

1937/USA/64 MIN
STARRING HUGH HERBERT, ALLEN JENKINS
AND MARCIA RALSTON
DIRECTED BY WILLIAM C. MCGANN

Beware the octopus! By the 1930s, the trappings of the old dark house subgenre had largely become clichés, and subsequent films started to add new wrinkles to the time-tested formula to poke fun at the earlier films' convoluted plot twists, red herrings and spookshow tricks.

The indelibly titled *Sh! The Octopus* ranks as perhaps the most frenzied and fun parody of classic suspense films. Things get started on a dark and stormy

Sheitan

Sh! The Octopus

evening, as police detectives Kelly (Hugh Herbert) and Dempsey (Allen Jenkins) are called to a decrepit lighthouse where heiress Verta Vernoff (Marcia Ralston) claims her stepfather was killed. Verta is convinced that a master criminal known as The Octopus is trying to steal his latest invention, a deadly "radium ray" weapon. When the bumbling cops arrive, they discover a corpse mysteriously hanging from the top rafters and no shortage of suspects, including a hook-handed salty sea captain (George Rosener), an artist (John Eldredge), a shipwrecked socialite (Margaret Irving) and even a "real" octopus living in a grotto under the lighthouse.

While the film can be enjoyed as a whodunit story with an actual solution, *Sh! The Octopus* is more like an M.C. Escher illustration than a story, featuring relentless twists and turns that progressively push the story beyond logic, until everything ultimately folds in on itself. It's horror by way of anarchic comedy, and it doesn't get much more satisfying – rubber tentacles and all. **PAUL COUPE**

SLITHER

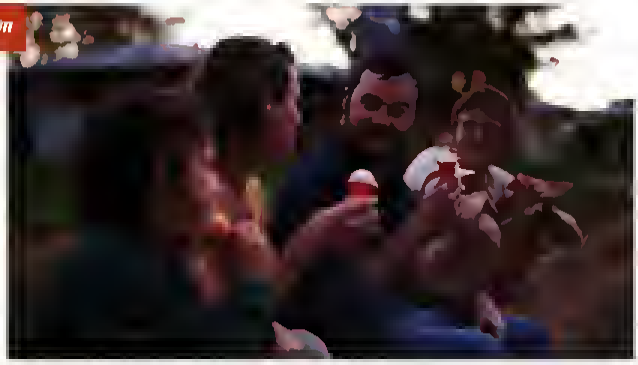
2006/CANADA USA/95 MIN
STARRING MICHAEL ROOKER, NATHAN FILLION AND ELIZABETH BANKS
DIRECTED BY JAMES GUNN

A lot of horror directors create love letters to the movies that shaped them, but few of these films rise above homage to become cult classics in their own right. James Gunn's B-movie masterpiece *Slither* is one title that does.

You could, of course, spend the entire film playing spot the influences, but it's much more fun to just let Gunn and his surprisingly well-rounded cast, including Michael Rooker (*Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*) and Nathan Fillion (*Firefly*), take you along on their wild cinematic ride.

Slither

Snowtown

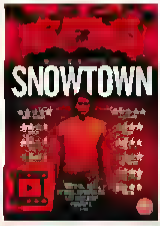


It all begins when an alien lifeform crashes to Earth and takes over the mind and body of Grant (Rooker), slowly turning him into a tentacled abomination with an instinctual imperative to impregnate human beings with hundreds of thousands of alien slugs that, when birthed, crawl into the mouths of previous unintected people, turning them into goo-spitting alien-controlled zombie automatons. Can police chief Bill Pardy (Fillion) and the surviving townies extinguish the threat before it escapes the city limits? Not without one helluva body count.

Loaded with seriously awesome practical effects that are enhanced with well-utilized CGI, great one-liners ("Bitch is hardcore!") and plenty of humour, *Slither* easily wormed its way into the hearts of the Rue Crew. Like *Cabin in the Woods*, which similarly flew over the heads of many mainstream viewers, *Slither* is a horror film for horror fans. Additionally, it's one of those rare offerings that never gets less gross or less grossly entertaining on repeat viewings. Zombifying, alien sex slugs for the win! **MONICA S. KUEBLER**

SNOWTOWN

2011/AUSTRALIA/119 MIN
STARRING LUCAS PITTAWAY, DANIEL HENSHALL AND LOUISE HARRIS
DIRECTED BY JUSTIN KURZEL



The phrase "based on true events" has been so overused that it doesn't mean much anymore. But if any film could reclaim those four words, it's *Snowtown*. On May 20, 1999, after a year-long investigation spurred by a missing persons report, South Australia Police entered a disused bank vault in the rural village of Snowtown, 150 km north of Adelaide, and made a gruesome discovery: six plastic barrels filled with acid and the bodies and body parts of eight people. Following the most extensive criminal investigation in the country's history, seven people were charged in what was discovered to be a murder spree headed by one John Bunting, a self-styled vigilante who rallied residents of the poverty-stricken Adelaide suburb of North Salisbury against people he considered homosexuals and pedophiles ... or just didn't like.

The relentlessly bleak *Snowtown* is the film inspired by the crimes, and yet this is not a movie about violent serial killers; it's an unflinching gaze into an abyss of human misery. Kurzel shot the film just blocks away from where the murders actually took place, and the cast is comprised mostly of locals. The sole professional actor is Daniel Henshall, who is brilliant as Bunting, but the cast of unprofessionals lends a naturalism to the proceedings that will break your heart.

There are horrific aspects to the crimes – torture, dismemberment and cannibalism – that a lesser filmmaker would have exploited, but Kurzel consciously chooses not to. Given the subject matter and the near-documentary aesthetic of *Snowtown*, it will undoubtedly endure comparisons to John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986) but, around here, that's a pretty great thing. **THE GORE-MET**

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

1983/USA/95 MIN
STARRING JASON ROBARDS, JONATHAN PRYCE AND DIANE LADD
DIRECTED BY JACK CLAYTON

Who would have believed that Disney would be responsible for one of the creepiest tales in the middle of the '80s? Released just when Jason and Michal Myers were busy polishing their knives yet again, this bittersweet tale of unfulfilled promises and regret is much more family-friendly than most horror films, but retains a grotesque, frightening edge that's still powerful today. For the film, Ray Bradbury adapted his own

Something Wicked This Way Comes

classic tale of young pals Will Halloway (Vidal Peterson) and Jim Nightshade (Shawn Carson), who become enthralled with a mysterious circus carnival that arrives in town and promises to fulfill the townsfolk's deepest, most dearly held wishes.

Jack Clayton, who previously helmed *The Innocents* (1961), spreads a layer of mysticism and magic over the film's lush, chilly autumn feel, as Will and Jim uncover the Faustian secrets of the carnival's proprietor Mr. Dark (Jonathan Pryce). Brilliantly capturing the daunting premise and nostalgic power of Bradbury's story, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* hearkens back to a time where family-friendly movies – even those from the legendary House of Mouse – didn't shy away from challenging youngsters with shocking images and sometimes disturbing ideas. **PAUL CORUPE**

THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE

1946/USA/83 MIN
STARRING DOROTHY MCGUIRE, GEORGE BRENT AND ETHEL BARRYMORE
DIRECTED BY ROBERT SIODMAK

"Anything can happen in the dark," the kitchen maid (Elsa Lanchester) chortles to Helen (Dorothy McGuire) after surreptitiously swiping a bottle of brandy at roughly the halfway point in *The Spiral Staircase*. As deliciously ironic as the remark may be, it does seem a tad unnecessary; no ghosts stalk the corridors of this mansion, but we know someone very dangerous is always very near, if just out of sight.

Left mute by a childhood trauma, Helen is now the caregiver for Mrs. Warren (Ethel Barrymore), a wealthy, bedridden old woman who drifts in and out of lucidity seemingly at random, but is secretly more prescient than her family or servants know. She resides in the Warren house, a big, rambling, extravagantly decorated affair dominating the landscape of a small New England town in the early 1900s, a place where a mysterious killer has been strangling young women. Each victim had a conspicuous imperfection – one crippled, one with a scarred face, one simple-minded – and Helen understandably fears she may be next. Throw in romantic entanglements, sibling rivalries, boozing servants, a lazy bulldog people keep trip-

The Spiral Staircase

SPIDER BABY

1966/USA/81 MIN
STARRING LON CHANEY JR, CAROL OHMART AND QUINN K REDEKER
DIRECTED BY JACK HILL

If ever a film deserved its "cult classic" tag, it's *Spider Baby*. Jack Hill's horror-comedy was shot in 1964, but due to financial and legal mishaps, didn't hit theatres until 1968 – and then only in a mangled version missing its shocking opening. In its brief theatrical run, though, its demented delights won over enough fans to birth the legend of a funny but frightening horror show you had to see to believe.

But seeing it wasn't easy. Hill, who went on to B-movie infamy with blaxploitation classics such as *Coffy* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974), lost track of the original print so finding *Spider Baby* meant tracking down grey market videotapes.

"Sometimes you couldn't even see the actors' faces," says Hill of the tapes' poor quality. "To see your film looking like that, 'appalled' is the only word I can use."

It wasn't until the '90s that *Spider Baby* made its legitimate VHS debut (it hit DVD in '99), and eventually Dark Sky Films put out a director's cut much to Hill's delight.

"It's a little vindication," he admits. "When you think you've made a good movie and then it gets lost and then suddenly people a generation later are finding all kinds of things in it and critics are writing about it, it's quite astonishing."

Originally titled *Cannibal Orgy, or The Maddest Story Ever Told*, *Spider Baby* stars faded horror legend Lon "The Wolfman" Chaney Jr as Bruno, caretaker for the Merrye children – Elizabeth (Beverly Washburn), Virginia (Jill Banner) and Ralph (*House of 1000 Corpses*' Sid Haig). All suffer from "progressive age regression," a sickness that takes hold in late childhood and causes the sufferer to lapse into madness and deformity. In Virginia's case, she likes to play "spider," a game that means 'stinging' her playmates to death with kitchen knives. Elizabeth's role is to chide and nag her sister, while Ralph, the furthest gone of the three, is a bug-eyed imbecile whose childlike demeanour is steps away from full-blown insanity.

Into this dysfunctional but happy family steps the kids' square Uncle Peter (Quinn K. Redeker) and greedy Aunt Emily (*House on Haunted Hill*'s Carol Ohmart). Armed with their toady lawyer (Karl Schanzer), they're out to institutionalize the kids and get their mitts on the Merrye fortune. But the Merryes, who know Bruno loves them no matter what their crimes, aren't about to let anyone tear them apart, even if it means killing all those who try.

"Crucial to the film's success was the casting, which combines newcomers like Haig and Banner with vets Ohmart and Chaney Jr. Getting Chaney, though, wasn't easy. Hill's production manager, Bart Patton, offered the star's agent $2500 but the agent, figuring Chaney deserved more for a horror gig, turned it down. So Patton and Hill went with their second choice, fellow horror icon John Carradine (*House of Dracula*), who just happened to share Chaney's agent. Says Hill: "Next thing we know we got a call back. 'Lon will do it.'"

The alcoholic actor was professional on set, says Hill. "He was staying on the wagon, at least as best he could," he recalls. "As far as I knew he wasn't drinking at all during the whole twelve days of the shoot. It was only many, many years later that I learned from Sid Haig that those orange [juices] he had in the afternoon were laced with vodka!"

The film finished, Hill and his producers showed it to West Coast distributors. A seemingly lacklustre response prompted the panicked producers to demand a re-edit. This new yet nonsensical version was similarly rebuffed by East Coast distributors, leading to it sitting on a shelf for four years. Its eventual 1968 release did well enough to spark a fanatical following, however, which continues to grow. As to why *Spider Baby* remains popular, especially among teenage girls, Hill offers up this explanation: "For kids that age who are going through all these struggles with their parents, [*Spider Baby*] is an example of no matter how bad you are, that unconditional love is still there."

SEAN PLUMMER

Spider Baby

Squirm

ping over, a boatload of emotional baggage and – cue the obligatory Dark and Stormy Night – you've pretty much got the ultimate American Gothic experience.

Shadowy, distorted German Expressionism is alive and well here too, occasionally giving *The Spiral Staircase* an anachronistic feel. It's a post-World War II film that often looks like something from twenty years earlier. And horror fans will find a whiff of yet another genre archetype lurking rather unexpectedly in these dark corridors. The giallo as we know it had its roots in Italian pulp fiction of the '50s and '60s, but given some of *The Spiral Staircase*'s key elements and images, such as an unidentified black-gloved serial killer stalking women, Dario Argento fans may be shocked to find themselves in familiar territory. **JOHN W. BOWEN**

SQUIRM

1976/USA/92 MIN
STARRING DON SCARDINO, PATRICIA PEARCY AND R.A. DOW
DIRECTED BY JEFF LIEBERMAN

Creature-feature auteurs were scraping the bottom of the food chain by the time the mid-'70s rolled around, but director Jeff Lieberman came up with a fistful of skin-crawling gold with his tale of bloodthirsty worms that, er, ascend upon the population of Fly Creek, Georgia.

It all starts when a nasty storm downs a power line, zapping a shitload of bloodworms (yes, those are real things) to the surface – and out of their wormy little minds. It isn't long before the hideous things are popping up everywhere – wreaking havoc at the local worm farm, oozing from a showerhead and, most memorably, burrowing into the face of a screaming good ol' boy.

Of course, a few worms aren't much of a threat unless they're of the Mongolian Death variety, so Lieberman ups the ante by fiddling hundreds of thousands of them out of Fly Creek's soil. It's up to a sexed-up Southern belle (Patricia Pearcy) and her nerdy, city-slicker boyfriend (Don Scardino) to save the town from an onslaught of pissed-off wrigglers. Often shown in extreme close-ups accompanied by nauseating sound effects, *Squirm*'s pincer-faced horrors are second only to haggis in sheer gross-out value.

Equal parts eco-horror and bizarre Southern Gothic, *Squirm* is a surprisingly effective monster flick that plays its audience like a finely-tuned banjo. Lieberman delivers on every gut-churning promise he makes, and the film features some gruesome makeup effects by a young Rick Baker. The image of worms crawling through a skull is certainly one of our culture's most enduring symbols of death, but it's positively unsettling when the skull belongs to a living, screaming man. It's tempting to write off *Squirm* as a cheesy indulgence – and it certainly is one – but don't underestimate its ability to, y'know, get under your skin. **APRIL SNELLINGS**

STAGE FRIGHT

1987/ITALY/90 MIN
STARRING DAVID BRANDON, BARBARA CUPISTI AND ROBERT CLIGDRDV
DIRECTED BY MICHELE SOAVI

Oh, *StageFright* – a.k.a. *Bloody Bird*, a.k.a. *Aquarius*, a.k.a. *Delirio* – that nutty Italian splatter film in which a group of amateur thespians are stalked and sliced to linguini by a lunatic wearing a giant bird head. It's as absurd as it sounds, but also great fun, one

Stage Fright, Stake Land

of the more (in)famous horror films of the 1980s, it marked the auspicious directorial debut of Michele Soavi (the same genius behind *Cemetery Man*).

In the midst of rehearsing *The Night Owl*, a gaudy musical about a mass murderer, a notorious psychopath escapes from the conveniently located nearby insane asylum, and winds up an unscripted part of the production. Locked inside with the cast and crew, and not content to merely share the spotlight, our looney friend enacts every starving actor's secret dream and proceeds to eliminate the competition in highly entertaining and by turns disgusting and disturbing fashion. This is nice juicy stuff here, kids: people are stabbed, eviscerated, beheaded, drilled, shot, burned and, most memorably, pick-axed through their gaping, screaming mouths.

Even if it can be accused of being little more than *Friday the 13th* with style and creativity, given what's become of the slasher film over the last decade, nostalgic slice 'n' dice fans will lap it up. **BRAD ABRAHAM**

STAKE LAND

2010/USA/98 MIN
STARRING CONNOR PAOLO, NICK DAMICI AND KELLY MCGILLIS
DIRECTED BY JIM MICKLE

The vampire apocalypse that ravages America in *Stake Land* might belong sately to the realm of make-believe, but everything else about the movie hits painfully close to home. Connor Paolo stars as Martin, a teenage boy who loses his entire family to the monstrous bloodsuckers that have brought America crashing down upon itself. With nowhere else to turn, he casts in his lot with Mister (Nick Damici), a grizzled vampire hunter who becomes a surrogate father to the boy. Martin and Mister join up with other survivors as they try to fight their way to Canada, where they hope to find sate haven.

Surviving the vampires is only hait the battle, though; they must also contend with The Brotherhood, a right-wing religious group led by a self-proclaimed prophet who thinks the vamps were sent by God to punish sinners. Any guess which monsters are the more terrifying?

Ultimately, *Stake Land* is as much a coming-ot-age story as it is a horror tale. Martin can't live in Mister's shadow forever, and must eventually learn to navigate this trightening new world on his own. And like the best horror movies, it's also a brilliant, deeply disturb-

ing social commentary that paints a bloody and uncomfortably believable picture of a country at war with itself. It's not exactly subtle in its indictment of America's current ideological polarization and the ever-increasing political influence of religious fundamentalists and social conservatives (well, at least that was the case before the 2012 election, showed a turn to the left), but it's unfailingly effective. Think *Mad Max* meets *The Grapes of Wrath*, with liberal doses of *The Walking Dead* thrown in for extra colour – blood red, of course. **APRIL SNELLINGS**

THE STENDHAL SYNDROME

1996/ITALY/120 MIN
STARRING ASIA ARGENTO
THOMAS KRETSCHMANN AND MARCO LEONARDI
DIRECTED BY DARIO ARGENTO

Every single Argento film from *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970) to *Opera* (1987) has been granted classic status, and every single film since then has been more or less savaged. One of these later period films is due for critical reassessment, however. *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996) A woman (Asia Argento) is overwhelmed by the artwork on display in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence and experiences a vivid underwater hallucination. Disoriented and suffering from amnesia, she's helped into a cab by a passerby, Alfredo (Thomas Kretschmann), and returns to her hotel. There she discovers that she's Assistant Inspector Anna Manni, a detective from Rome tracking a vicious rapist/serial killer.

She's soon stalked by the sociopath she's determined to bring to justice, and after a series of sadistic set pieces, the film comes to a brutal but satisfying rape/revenge-style conclusion – were it over. In an extended coda, Anna, emotionally and physically scarred, retreats into a gentle love affair with a young painter. When fresh blood is shed, though, she's convinced Alfredo still haunts her.

The *Stendhal Syndrome* is arguably the best film Argento has made in the last 25 years, despite a canned dialogue track and Anna's unlikely relationship with her hangdog boyfriend Marco (Marco Leonardi). The key to fully appreciating it is to place it within the arc of Argento films that include *Tenebre* (1982), *Phenomena* (1985) and *Opera* (1987), as it's stylistically and thematically linked to this portion of his body of work. *The Stendahl Syndrome* is beautifully rendered, scored, and as violent as his '80s films, making it an overlooked entry in the filmmaker's lengthy, uneven body of work.

THE GORE MET

The Stendhal Syndrome

STREET TRASH

1987/USA/91 MIN
STARRING MIKE LACKEY, BILL CHEPIL AND VIC NOTO
DIRECTED BY JIM MURO

New York City was one of the worst places on Earth in the 1980s – at least according to genre movies of the era. Meet Fred (Mike Lackey) and his younger brother, Kevin (Mark Sferrazza), who live in a pile of old tires in a rundown auto wrecking yard lorded over by psychotic Vietnam vet Bronson (Vic Noto), where they eke out a daily existence looking for food and a bottle. An unscrupulous liquor store owner finds a dusty case of 60-year-old booze behind a wall in the basement of his decrepit shop and puts it out for sale to his homeless clientele, but those who drink it melt into technicolour glop. A hard-boiled cop (Bill Chepil) is on the case and looking to take down Bronson, but, meanwhile, life gets even harder for Fred when a mafia hit is put on him after he brings home the drunken moll of the local don and she's gang-raped and murdered. It all comes to a chaotic head in a frenzy of exploding bums, severed penises, necrophilia and neon barf!

This is one of the quintessential American cult films of the '80s – vibrant, relentlessly offensive and showered in bodily fluids. It's also likely the only humanist exploitation film ever made, for no matter how filthy, the characters are imbued with individuality and dignity. At least until they overflow a toilet with their liquefied innards! Then film student Jim Muro's prowling camerawork led to him becoming one of the most in-demand Steadicam operators in Hollywood, with credits that include such blockbusters as *Dances With Wolves* and *Titanic*. *Street Trash* and *Titanic*: two movies that'll test your gag reflex. **THE GORE MET**

STUCK

2007/CANADA/USA/UK/95 MIN
STARRING STEPHEN REA, MENA SUVARI AND RUKIYA BERNARD
DIRECTED BY STUART GORDON

There's hit and run, and then there's what Chante Jawan Mallard did. In 2001, the Texan woman, while drunk, plowed into Gregory Briggs, a homeless man who flew partway through her windshield, getting lodged in the vehicle, which she then drove home and parked in the garage. Gregory begged for help, but instead of saving his life, Chante went inside and humped her boyfriend while her victim died slowly. She tried to cover up the murder, but was eventually caught and sentenced to 50 years in which to contemplate her inhumanity.

In classic ripped-from-the-headlines exploitation style, Stuart Gordon (with the help of co-writer John

Street Trash

Suicide Club, Stuck

Strysik) takes the story, expands upon it and amps up the atrocity for maximum entertainment value. Mena Suvari stars as Brandi Boski, a young nurse at an old folks home who parties too much and has some seriously white trash cornrows, but is otherwise reasonably likable. Stephen Rea is down-on-his-luck Thomas Bardo, a recently unemployed man who just can't catch a break – well, other than the various bones he busts while sailing through the window of Brandi's four-wheeled hobo-smasher.

Too crass? Well, *Stuck* has a very black sense of humour. Rea brings surprising levity to his character's ridiculous situation, as Thomas struggles to free himself managing only to get stuck even further – all the while completely flabbergasted by Brandi's incredulous actions.

Good ole Stu Gordo proves once again that he's just as confident tackling true crime horror as he is Lovecraftian horror. And, without giving much away, he also manages – on one level – to settle the score a bit for poor Gregory Briggs. **DAVE ALEXANDER**

SUICIDE CLUB

2001/JAPAN/99 MIN
STARRING RYO ISHIBASHI, MASATOSHI NAGASE AND TAMAO SATO
DIRECTED BY SHIDN SONO

Criminy! Leave it to those crazy Japanese to think up a premise of startling dread, splice it into a detective story, work in some subtext about the generation gap and then blow the whole thing up with a music video.

Shion Sono's *Suicide Club* (a.k.a. *Suicide Circle*) is all that and more, a noteworthy achievement by any standard. The premise: 54 high school girls commit suicide en masse, jumping out onto the subway tracks while holding hands. Needless to say, the cops are preoccupied, and not just by the unforgettable sight of a subway train drenched in gore – could this be a new trend? Yup. Pretty soon girls and boys are inexplicably reddening school yards and roadsides like watermelons thrown from rooftops.

Enter Detective Kuroda. He turns his attention to a white bag that mysteriously appears at each death scene. In it is a 200-foot roll of human flesh stitched together like a grisly strip of decaying bacon. It turns out that everyone in this "suicide pact" has had a piece of their flesh cut and stitched into the roll, but

why is anyone's guess. This weird signifier has a counterpart in a bizarre website that keeps tabs on the suicides without ever commenting on them.

Sono scores some major points with his handling of a truly bizarre selection of imagery and innocuous situations that end in horror and violence. At some points, it truly defies description, particularly when some of the cast breaks into a rock video performance! The music angle is maintained 'til the end and eventually yields some sinister treats, but by that time *Suicide Club* will have already lost you or won you over with its unrelenting weirdisms. **RODRIGO GUDIÑO**

TARGETS

1968/USA/90 MIN
STARRING BORIS KARLOFF, PETER BOGDANOVICH AND TIM O'KELLY
DIRECTED BY PETER BOGDANOVICH

Targets begins with two apparently unconnected storylines. In the first, Boris Karloff essentially plays himself as Byron Orlok, an aging horror film icon who's anxious to retire on the grounds that real life has become infinitely scarier than any of his films. *Targets*' writer/director Peter Bogdanovich, playing a thinly disguised caricature of himself, is a young filmmaker desperately trying to cajole Orlok into one last hurrah. Elsewhere in Los Angeles, in a Lynchian netherworld that eerily anticipates *Blue Velvet*, a seemingly wholesome young man (Tim O'Kelly) amasses an arsenal of weaponry for a killing spree. The two plot threads intersect seamlessly in the final reel, as these characters square-off at a drive-in horror show. As clever as the postmodern conceit may be, all would be for naught had Bogdanovich not delivered such a suspenseful and genuinely shocking climax.

Targets, which launched Bogdanovich's career, is a far cry from the car chases, sex comedies and schlocky horror producer Roger Corman was cranking out for the drive-ins and grindhouses in the '60s and '70s. Released just after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., it didn't do much business but it did win sufficient critical acclaim to turn Bogdanovich into a hot property. Three years later, his masterpiece *The Last Picture Show* would rocket him to the top of the directorial heap and *Paper Moon* would win further accolades.

And while Karloff would star in several dismal Mexican horror films before his death, *Targets* – of which he was justifiably proud – is still widely regarded as his last "official" film. Way ahead of its time, it was the first movie to seriously question the role of art horror in the wake of real-world horror. **JOHN W. BOWEN**

TASTE OF FEAR

1961/UK/81 MIN
STARRING SUSAN STRASBERG, RONALD LEWIS AND ANN TODD
DIRECTED BY SETH HOLT

With the critical and commercial success of shockers such as *Diabolique* (1955) and *Psycho* (1960), England's Hammer Films moved beyond its familiar gothic horror output in the early 1960s to produce a series of highly regarded black-and-white psychological thrillers with titles including *Paranoiac*, *Nightmare*, *The Nanny* and *Taste of Fear*. Of these, *Taste of Fear* (released as *Scream of Fear* in the US) is arguably the best.

Penny Appleby (Susan Strasberg) is a wheelchair-bound woman who, after receiving a letter from her father, returns to her family home on the southeast coast of France. Upon her arrival, however, she is informed by her stepmother, Jane (Ann Todd), that her father – whom she hasn't seen in ten years – had to leave unexpectedly for a business trip and hasn't returned yet. That night, Penny awakens to notice a candle flickering in the summer house and enters it to find the man's lifeless figure sitting in a chair. But when she attempts to alert Ann, the family's sympathetic chauffeur Bob (Ronald Lewis) and icy physician, Dr. Gerrard (Christopher Lee), of her father's corpse, she finds that the body is suddenly gone. When she sees the body again later in her bedroom, the doctor is skeptical of Penny's claims and questions her mental health. Is the emotionally frail young woman suffering from hallucinations, or is someone – as Bob suspects – trying to drive her mad to collect on her inheritance?

An atmospheric, suspense-filled gem (co-star Lee stated it was one of the best movies he ever appeared in), this "mini-Hitchcock" (as these Hammer productions have been fondly dubbed) benefits from an excellent script from Hammer veteran Jimmy Sangster, stunning photography and standout performances from all involved. And like a good Hitchcock movie, it'll have you guessing right up 'til the end.

JAMES RURRELL

TAXIDERMIA

2006/HUNGARY/AUSTRIA/FRANCE/ 91 MIN
STARRING CSABA CZENE, GERGELY TROCSANYI AND MARC BISCHOFF
DIRECTED BY GYORGY PALFI

Best Film You Didn't See in 2009, that's what *Rue Morgue* called *Taxidermia*. Having just watched it a second time, I can see why: it's got miles of style and a matter-of-fact rococo wit, if that makes any sense. I think it might even out-Cronenberg David Cronen-

Taste of Fear

Taxidermia, Them

berg and that's saying a hell of a lot. Based on the stories of a Hungarian writer you never heard of (his name is Lajos Parti Nagy), *Taxidermia* anatomizes three generations of Hungarian men linked by some pretty bizarre hereditary fetishes.

The first concerns Morosgovanyi, a post-WWII army orderly wiling his time away by putting his penis in anything that vaguely resembles female genitalia. Director Gyorgy Palfi puts us in the head (and eyes) of his chronic masturbator, as he obsesses over every physical detail of farm life in a tireless quest to get off. In a surreal flourish characteristic of the film's literary source material, Morosgovanyi spectacularly ejaculates into the night sky, his semen joining the stars of the firmament.

That semen finds its way into the innards (and this movie is all about innards) of his general's portly wife, who promptly gives birth to a little boy with a pig's tail. The boy grows up to become the subject of the film's second story. Balatony, a lovesick speed eater who shovels vast quantities of food into his mouth in the name of sport. Body horror breaks new ground on the vomitorium scenes alone, but watching this sweat-soaked chronic overeater make his romantic overtures reaches a level of comic grotesque seldom seen in cinema.

Rounding out the tryptich is the story of Balatony's son Lajos, a weirdo taxidermist turned manservant to his dad, who in his retirement has degenerated into a sofa-bound Jabba the Hut. Finding him snacked on by his cats, Lajos stuffs his father before turning the scalpel on himself in a grisly coda that – if nothing else – proves that Morosgovanyi's sperm does indeed shine over the generations.

Bizarre and fascinating, *Taxidermia* is like a stroll through a living Mütter Museum where the exhibits just kind of sit there, oblivious to scrutiny. Thankfully, the heart of this film is not just another exposed organ, those who care to look will find the acrid bile of alienation and loneliness leaking from the gaping flesh. Nauseating yes, but more than mere biology.

RODRIGO GUDIÑO

THEM

2006/FRANCE,ROMANIA/77 MIN
STARRING OLIVIA BONAMY, MICHAEL COHEN
AND ADRIANA MOCCA
DIRECTED BY DAVID MOREAU
AND XAVIER PALUD

Them is the kind of movie that should carry a health warning. A home invasion film that involves its audience with such intense ferocity, you'll feel lucky to have survived by the time the credits roll.

It follows Clementine (Olivia Bonamy) and Lucas (Michaël Cohen), a young couple living in an old house in the country. One evening, not long after first moving in, they begin to hear strange noises outside and see flashlight beams shining through their windows. Soon, their new home becomes a death trap as mysterious, hooded figures stalk their every move.

We may as well be in the house with Clementine and Lucas, as we feel every tense second right along with them, thanks to some skillful direction by David Moreau and Xavier Palud. An absence of orchestral hits and cheap jump-scares keeps the tension peaking as the couple hides, fights and runs for their lives. And in terms of building the scares to a shrill climax, what you see is just as important as what you don't see here. *Them* is remarkable in its use of simple techniques to make a straightforward story gripping, for example, the camera honing in a closet door that's open just a crack can take your breath away in this film.

Home invasion flicks often walk a line between nightmarish terror and cheap voyeurism, and *Them* shows us how it's done. CHARLOTTE STEAR

TOMBS OF THE BLIND DEAD

1972/SPAIN,PORTUGAL/86 MIN
STARRING CESAR BURNER, LONE FLEMING
AND MARIA ELENA ARPON
DIRECTED BY AMANDO DE OSSORIO

If Amando de Ossorio can be accused of borrowing heavily from *Night of the Living Dead*, he may also be excused because in doing so he made one of the finest Spanish horror franchises of all time. In case you haven't heard of him, de Ossorio is one of the definitive masters of the Mediterranean horror film, his career spanning some fifteen years beginning with 1972's *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (a.k.a. *The Blind Dead*, *Crypt of the Blind Dead* and *Night of the Blind Dead*).

The film begins with the story of a group of knights,

Tombs of the Blind Dead

TOOLBOX MURDERS

2004/USA/R/91 MIN
STARRING ANGELA [illegible] JULIET [illegible]
AND BRENT ROAM
DIRECTED BY TOBE HOOPER

Toolbox Murders is arguably the movie everyone was waiting for Tobe Hooper to make since *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. There's a love of power tools in these frames – the shrill mad shriek as they close in for the kill – and a genuine vision for putting them to ill use. The felinous throwback splatter of Hooper's remake is a celebration of the kind of unbounded blood spray that '70s horror flicks are worshiped for.

Written – incredibly – by the same duo who stained Hooper's name with the abominable *Crocodile* (2000), *Toolbox Murders* tells the tale of Nell (Angela Bettis) who moves into a dilapidated apartment with her husband Steven. The place is a rundown mess, a shadow of its once-glorious past as a Hollywood home to the stars. Perpetually under lit with paper thin walls and a creepy-looking maintenance guy, the place functions as an ominous stage for the ghostly hint of something in the walls and the tangible threat of some sick freak running around drilling holes in tenants' heads, stapling a woman to the ceiling and sawing, cutting and butchering with wild, crimson-stained abandon.

Admittedly, there's not much here we haven't seen before, but *Toolbox Murders* is a movie you'll love precisely because you know what it has in store for you. And what it has is several jump-out-of-your-seat moments, some vicious and delicious kills, a little mystery, a little sex and even a giant table saw. Horror cutie du jour Sean Moon gets busted up with a hammer real good and the tenants – while painted with very broad strokes – don't lapse into the kind of stupidity that gets audiences counting down the minutes to their deaths.

By the time you get to the movie's awkward denouement, you'll be too wet to care, and the Michael Myers ending will seem oddly appropriate because, deep down inside, you may find yourself secretly believing that *Toolbox Murders* was actually shot in the '70s. It certainly feels that way and, you know, it's a good feeling. *Rue Morgue* caught up with Tobe Hooper to discuss the film.

***What did you think of the original* Toolbox Murders?**

I only saw the first ten minutes of it. Oh no, wait, I did see it over a period of time. I knew there was a handyman in an apartment complex; Cameron Mitchell and the little doll and the girl tied up in bed, and I realized it was kind of like the dinner-table scene in *Chainsaw*. It was crazy but it wasn't convincing because it was playing out crazy. And the way to show crazy in a movie is to show it in an ironic way – let people act as they would in a crazy situation.

As in* Chainsaw*'s "You're just a cook!" exchange.

Yes, exactly. "You're just a cook!" and "Look what your brother did to the door!" Those things took almost five years to get a laugh out of the audience! A year or so ago I read an interview with Tony DiDio, the producer of both *Toolbox* films, about how he got two writers and told them to try to make something like *Chainsaw*.

With* Toolbox *being essentially a child of* Chainsaw, *remaking it did you feel a need to return to a '70s sensibility, the way so many other filmmakers have tried to do over the last few years?

I felt I needed to have as many shock-jumps in there as I could manage to work in, what George Romero and Tom Savini call "chair-jumpers," and that isn't easy to do. A lot of that is sleight of hand and misdirection, almost a carnivalesque thing. The films of the '70s had a lot of jumps in them, and almost invariably you'd have about three of them – that was considered a good horror show if you had three, or maybe four. And if you design a film so it has seven or eight or even ten, then something really extraordinary begins happening on the fourth or fifth one.

Was Angela Bettis your first choice for the lead?

Oh, yeah. Angela's great.

Were cuts made to trim down the gore? The drill-through-the-back-of-the-head sequence has that look to it.

Yeah, there's about twenty seconds, maybe 30 seconds, gone where that scene went so ove the top, where the drill was coming out of Juliet Landau's mouth [laughs]. The MPAA said, "That's not happening." God bless the MPAA, huh?

RODRIGO GUDIÑO

known as the Templars, seeking eternal life by drinking human blood in elaborate satanic rituals. They are caught and executed for their crimes, their eyes pecked out by crows. Flash forward to present-day Portugal where three backpackers find themselves in a remote abbey; night falls and the graves open, unleashing the blind Templars now desperate for human prey. Eventually the knights board the train and wreak havoc among the terrified passengers until the carnage – knights and all – arrives at the city platform.

Somewhat haunting and sombre in its savage nihilism, *Tombs of the Blind Dead* is a film of beautiful visuals with lingering scenes of the ghostly knights galloping on their horses through the foggy crypts, and the blood ritual segment, during which a village woman is stabbed and drained of her blood, is daring for its time. If you like your horror high on atmosphere, you can't do better than this Spanish classic. **EMMA ANDERSON**

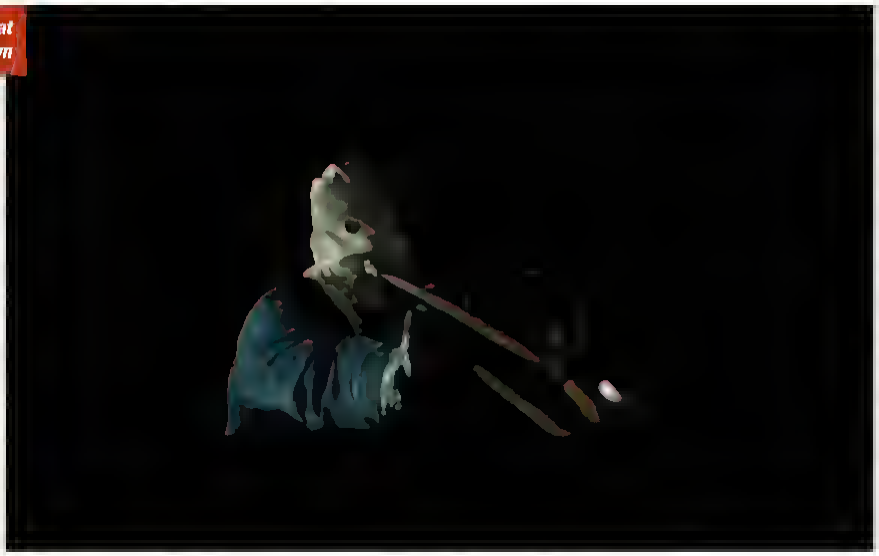
THE TOWN THAT DREADED SUNDOWN

1976/USA/87 MIN
STARRING BEN JOHNSON, ANDREW PRINE AND DAWN WELLS
DIRECTED BY CHARLES B. PIERCE

An unknown maniac stalks the streets of Texarkana in Charles B. Pierce's intense depiction of still-unsolved killings that took place in the 1940s. Pierce was a master at merging documentary filmmaking techniques with tales of terror, most notably with his cryptid-horror classic *The Legend of Boggy Creek*, and *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* likewise gets deep under your skin with its unflinching camerawork, naturalistic settings and underlying mood of dread. After a necking couple are viciously attacked (and repeatedly chewed on!) by a hulking figure with a canvas sack over his head, local authorities start to get worried. As more random attacks occur, the townspeople begin to live in fear of the hooded figure, now dubbed The Phantom Killer, and authorities call in a special criminal investigator to lead a massive manhunt and put an end to the deaths.

Anticipating the slasher boom by a few years, *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* uses a familiar documentary and police procedural framework to stage its series of murders that, despite assurances at the beginning of the film, actually divert significantly from the real killings that took place. But it isn't the reality that makes the film so effectively tense, just the overall appearance of it, and Pierce puts together a convincing case. But more importantly, *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*'s Phantom Killer is one of the most effective characters of the 1970s, de-

The Town That Dreaded Sundown



serving of a spof beside Michael Myers as a questionably supernatural force able to hold an enfire fown in fear jusf by his mere presence. **PAUL CORUPE**

TRICK 'R TREAT

2007/USA/82 MIN
STARRING ANNA PAQUIN, BRIAN COX AND DYLAN BAKER
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL DOUGHERTY

Given horror filmmakers' penchanf for trolling the calendar for plot devices, it's surprising there haven't been more movies centred around the genre's one dedicated holiday. Happily, the slate of Halloween sfaples got a killer jolf a few years ago with the shamefully underseen anthology film *Trick 'r Treat*, which strings together a handful of stories that perfectly capture the spirit of All Hallow's Eve. The titular tradition comes prominently into play, as do jack-o'-lanterns, ghosfs, zombies, masked killers, werewolves, vampires and practically any other October mainstay you can name.

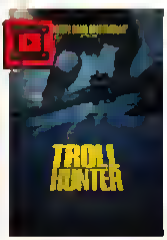
All the stories take place over the course of one Halloween night in a sleepy, suburban town, and they intersect in clever, unpredicfable ways. Buf fhe real connective tissue here is Sam, a pint-sized demon in footed pajamas and a burlap mask that hides a deliciously creepy visage. Treat Halloween with the respect it deserves, and you and Sam will get along just fine; mock it – or, even worse, let it pass unobserved – and he'll make sure you live (barely) long enough fo regret it.

Trick 'r Trick is thaf rarest of beasts: an anthology film without a single clunker to weigh it down. It's suspenseful, funny and genuinely creepy, with just enough gore fo satisfy us horror fans without alienating viewers with weaker consfitutions. Few films have ever captured fhe look and feel of the season more effectively. Think of it as *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* for grown-ups – a pitch-perfecf mood-setter that deserves fo become a new Halloween fradition.

APRIL SNELLINGS

TROLL HUNTER

2010/NORWAY/103 MIN
STARRING OTTO JESPERSEN, ROBERT STOLTENBERG AND KNUT NÆRUM
DIRECTED BY ANDRE ØVREDAL



If countries had national monsters, Norway's would certainly be the troll. The things have been crashing through the dark woods of fhe nation's collecfive psyche for more than a century now, but pop culfure has not been kind to the once-fearsome creatures. Over the course of the past few decades, these monstrous eaters of children have gradually been reduced fo pot-bellied pencil-toppers and gift shop souvenirs – a sad fate indeed.

Trick 'R Treat

But what if trolls were real, and what if the Norwegian government knew about them? The result is the monster mockumentary *Troll Hunter*, which follows a group of film students who think they're tailing an infamous poacher. They soon learn that the mysterious Hans (Norwegian comedian Otto Jespersen) is after bigger game than bears – he is Norway's best (okay, only) troll hunter. He reluctantly agrees to let the kids follow him on his rounds through the breathtaking Norwegian wilderness as he searches for rogue trolls. Is there any doubt that things will go horribly wrong?

The film has played to almost universal acclaim from genre and mainstream audiences alike, and has been cited as one of the biggest cultural events in its home country in recent years. In spite of its modest budget and mockumentary trappings, *Troll Hunter* owes more to *Jurassic Park* than *The Blair Witch Project*; it's more concerned with spectacle than scares, and has more in common with classic monster movies than with its modern, found-footage counterparts. An

Troll Hunter

10 ALTERNATIVE VAMPIRE FILMS YOU NEED TO SEE

BY LUISA LADDUCEUR

Horror aficionado

BYZANTIUM

2012/USA/118 MIN

Neil Jordan directed *Interview with a Vampire*, so he knows a little something about making vampire films on an epic scale. For his return to the subject he's chosen a subtler story, about mother-daughter vampires hunting and hiding their secret lives in a seaside resort town. The magic is in the unravelling of the back story and the spellbinding scenery – hello, waterfall of blood! There are gruesome decapitations for the gorehounds but this one is more of an art film for fans of European movies such as *Let the Right One In*. Too soon to call it a classic but a bloody beautiful cinematic jewel nonetheless.

CRONOS

1993/MEXICO/94 MIN

Before Guillmero del Toro made one of the best vampire films of all time with *Blade II*, he wrote and directed this quietly disturbing Mexican movie about immortality through alchemy. The title refers to the Cronos Device – a kind of mechanical vampire that provides both pleasure and pain – not unlike *Hellraiser*'s Lament Configuration, actually. The man that tempts his fate with it is antiques dealer Jesus Gris (Federico Luppi), who soon finds himself addicted to drinking blood and hunted by a tycoon desperate to get his hands on the anti-aging device. *Cronos* foreshadowed several hallmarks of del Toro's later horror films, including strong child characters, unusual creature design and excellent use of Ron Perlman (here, as the hitman Angel). The most unique film on this list, it's now available as a Criterion edition DVD and Blu-ray.

DAYBREAKERS

2009/AUSTRALIA/98 MIN

If you're going to make a film about vampires taking over the world in the future, you had better work out the little details. Like how they'll drink their coffee (with blood!), go out in the daylight (blacked-out cars with guided cruise control!) or deal with growing food shortages (no spoilers here). This modern classic from Australians Peter and Michael Spierig, starring Willem Dafoe and Ethan Hawke, is part sci-fi, part horror and part action, which updates the legend with our modern-day fears (plagues, outsiders, corporate greed) and a stylish steel-blue colour palette. If the *Underworld* and *Twilight* series made you give up on mass-market contemporary vamp flicks, this one should not disappoint.

DRÁCULA

1931/USA/104 MIN

Take note of that accent in the title: this is not the famed Bela Lugosi version of Bram Stoker's gothic horror novel. Rather, a Spanish one produced by Universal Pictures at the same time. Literally in the era before dubbing, studios used the same sets and props to make foreign language movies, so when Tod Browning's *Dracula* crew packed up each day, director George Beltord and his Spanish cast swooped in to film throughout the night. All the better for making such an atmospheric *Dracula*, with the seductive Eva (Lupita Tovar), the over-the-top madman Renfield (Pablo Alvarez Rubio) and Carlos Villarias as el Conde. Available on the *Dracula: The Legacy Collection* DVD set.

DRACULA: PAGES FROM A VIRGIN'S DIARY

2003/CANADA/73 MIN

You've read the novel, seen the films and possibly even attended a play, now why not try a Dracula ballet? Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin put his shadowy spin on Stoker's well-known story as a black-and-white silent movie starring The Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Dracula is played here by dancer Zhang Wei-Qiang, but it's all

about Miss Lucy, as performed provocatively by Tara Birtwhistle. Surreal, sexy, with just the right dose of winks at its source material, this may be the dreamiest *Dracula* yet.

HORROR OF DRACULA

1958/UK/82 MIN

With apologies to Bela Lugosi, cinema's most wicked Count Dracula remains Christopher Lee, star of a series of horror flicks by Britain's Hammer Studios in the 1950s to '70s. It all started with this one (which every vamp fan seems to know, yet surprisingly few have actually seen) directed by Terence Fisher and known simply as *Dracula* in the UK. The first full-colour adaptation of the tale offers bosoms, blood, and a kind of scholarly action hero in Peter Cushing's vampire hunter Van Helsing, plus a fast-paced, original screenplay that heightens the psychosexual drama of the novel. Lee plays the Count fiercely, like a villainous lover, and made movie history as the first bloodsucker to actually bare fangs on screen. Essential.

THE HUNGER

1983/USA/97 MIN

When director Tony Scott died in 2012, I was amazed how few people said they'd seen his vampire movie, which is one of the genre's best. Not only because the opening sequence with Bauhaus playing "Bela Lugosi's Dead" in a cage is Goth as Fuck. Not only because they cast David Bowie as a vampire. And not only because Catherine Deneuve and Susan Sarandon have a steamy lesbian sex scene. No, it's because this story of a beautiful immortal struggling with the loss of everyone she's ever loved, an aging vampire desperate to find a cure in sleep science experiments and the doctor caught between them is rapturously nasty, artfully atmospheric, gory when need be and truly haunting from start to finish. Watch with the lights out and the candles burning.

IN SEARCH OF DRACULA

1975/USA/66 MIN

Fancy a documentary about vampires? May as well pick one starring Christopher Lee himself. Lee narrates this investigation of the historical origins of *Dracula*, based on the influential book of the same name by Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu. The authors were the first to propose that Stoker's Count was based on Transylvanian Prince Vlad "The Impaler" Tepes. Who cares that their theory has since been proven flawed? This slow-moving retro doc still offers a solid overview of vampire mythology set to vintage horror film clips and original footage of Romanian castles and peasant traditions circa 1970s, not to mention Christopher Lee dressed up like Tepes for recreation scenes.

SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE

2000/USA/92 MIN

Nosferatu. Meta. My hands-down favourite vampire film of all time is the one that perfectly combines horror, humour, art and artifice and stars Willem Dafoe as the most genuinely monstrous yet captivating bloodsucker in cinema. Imagine if you will that F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*, the 1922 classic of silent German Expressionism, starred an actual vampire. And so it goes that Dafoe portrays Max Schreck portraying the creeptacular cave-dwelling Count Orlock, lured into making a motion picture. John Malkovich plays Murnau as he goes insane trying to complete his film and keep Orlock from murdering everyone on set. The following exchange sums up their relationship nicely. Murnau: "Why him, you monster? Why not... the script girl?" Schreck: "Oh, the script girl. I'll eat her later." Marvellous!

Shadow of the Vampire

VAMP

1986/USA/93 MIN

If you got a kick out of the 1980s-style horror-comedy (and tacky fashions) of *Fright Night*, you may dig this seemingly silly title from the same era, about two college kids looking to hire a stripper but who end up in a seedy nightclub run by vampires. The secret weapon is the star: androgynous, alien-esque singer Grace Jones. As Vampire Queen Katrina, she makes one of the best entrances of any vampire movie, performing an oddly erotic striptease routine covered in body paint. But when she bares her fangs and goes in for the kill you won't be laughing. Grotesquely creepy effects makeup for her climactic destruction scene, are also killer. Surprisingly fun budget-bin thrills.

Tucker & Dale vs. Evil

American remake is already in the pipeline, so you'll want to watch this before Hollywood gets their mitts on it. APRIL SNELLINGS

TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL

2010/CANADA/89 MIN
STARRING ALAN TUDYK, TYLER LABINE AND KATRINA BOWDEN
DIRECTED BY ELI CRAIG

Tucker & Dale vs Evil is one of those brilliantly simple ideas you just can't believe hasn't been done before. Subverting that all-too-common tale of crazy hillbillies in a cabin in the woods, it manages to be funny, gory and smart in equal measure.

While on a vacation at their new but rundown cabin, good friends Tucker (Alan Tudyk) and Dale (Tyler Labine) encounter a bunch of self-obsessed teenagers who immediately assume that the two are a pair of psychos straight out of a backwoods horror film. After one of the teens falls off a rocky ledge and almost drowns, the rich kids convince themselves that the men are out to kill them. In reality, Tucker and Dale are two of the nicest people you could ever meet, and therein lies everything you need to know to imagine how things turn out.

Watching a bunch of preppy teens stumble into one hare-brained fatality after another has never been so satisfying, not to mention hilarious. It's a perfect film to watch with a group of horror fans because it's made with them in mind; the constant referencing and parody of other films guarantees things never get too serious.

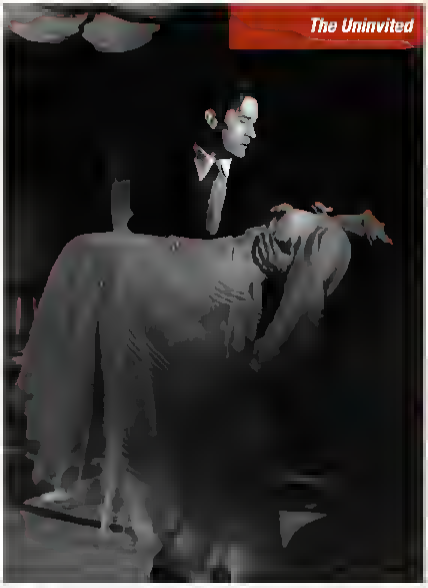
Even so, *Tucker & Dale vs Evil* delivers the gore groceries, as those insufferable teens get picked off in all kinds of ways, from the classic impaled-on-a-branch to the truly unique obliterated-by-a-wood-chipper.

Underlying it all is, of course, a sweet message about stereotypes, but there's so much gore and fun to be had that you might not notice. *Tucker & Dale vs Evil* has a whole new formula which proves no matter how much something has been done, you can always put a new twist to it. CHARLOTTE STEAR

THE UNINVITED

1944/USA/99 MIN
STARRING RAY MILLAND, RUTH HUSSEY AND DONALD CRISP
DIRECTED BY LEWIS ALLEN

One of the first feature horror films to treat ghostly apparitions with the respect they deserve, Lewis Allen's brooding Gothic mystery is also one of finest films of the 1940s that wasn't made by Val Lewton. Ray Milland is particularly notable as stoic composer Rick Fitzgerald who, while on vacation with his sister Pamela (Ruth Hussey), falls in love with a creaky old house that the pair decides to purchase on a whim. But, on moving in, they discover they got more than they bar-



The Uninvited

gained for as the creepy disturbances begin to mount – dimming candles, cold spots and the sound of a weeping woman send chills up the siblings' spines. Could it be the original owner's daughter who fell off the cliff to her death years ago? As Rick and Pamela unravel the sordid history of their home, they come to an even more startling conclusion.

Working closely with cinematographer Charles Lang, Allen evokes an enveloping ghostly atmosphere, creating a triumph of suggestion and mood. And while not as well known as similar ghostly gems like *The Haunting* and *The Legend of Hell House*, *The Uninvited* is at least as important in the history of ghost films, helping to rescue the then-tired Old Dark House trope from the subject of Poverty Row comedies and give it a new life as a genuinely scary setting.

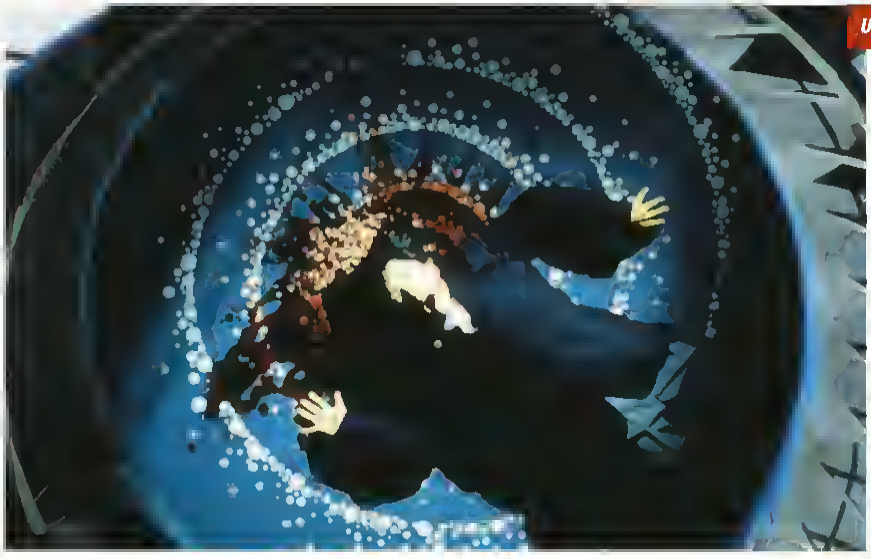
PAUL CORUPE

UZUMAKI

2000/JAPAN/90 MIN
STARRING ERIKO HATSUNE, FHI FAN AND REN OHSUGI
DIRECTED BY HIGUCHINSKY

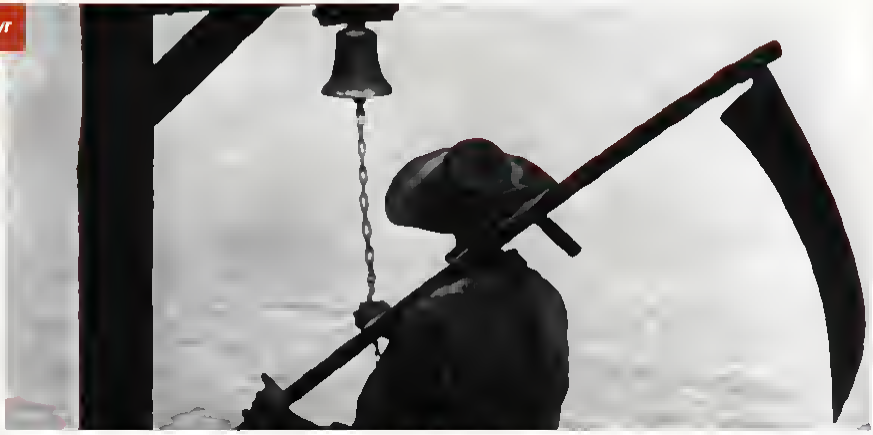
Snails, fingerprints, fish cakes – what do these have in common? They contain spirals, and in the world of *Uzumaki*, that makes them deadly. Based on a manga title of the same name (translated, it means "spiral") by horror manga god Junji Ito (*Gyo*, *Tomie*), and directed by Higuchinsky, this is the kind of movie you want to drop in the lap of anyone who says they've seen it all.

In the town of Kurouzu, high school student Kirie (Eriko Hatsune) finds herself in the midst of a truly bizarre plague that's causing everyone around her to obsess over spirals, they go mad, mutilate themselves and even physically mutate. It begins with Toshio (Ren Ohsugi), the father of her boyfriend Shuichi (Fhi Fan), photographing



Uzumaki

Vampyr



snails and eventually crawling into a washing machine, which twists and rends his body into a spiral. Later, his wife butchers her hands trying to get rid of her fingerprints, before going after the swirl-shaped cochlea in her inner-ear.

Things are no better at school, though, as one girl's hair transforms into huge curls that seem to mesmerize the other girls, and one boy starts turning into a snail. A news team visits Kurouzu to report on the strange incidents, only to find themselves trapped there. Meanwhile, a spiralling plume of smoke rises from the town with apocalyptic menace. There literally is no escape from the spiral.

Uzumaki was made before the three-part manga series was even finished, and doesn't have the same subterranean Lovecraftian ending as the manga, but that's OK because the film is already full of enough uncanny madness and mindbending (well, whole body bending, really) body horror to fill a dozen horror movies. Higuchinsky makes it very clear here just why he deserves deity status amongst the faithful. **DAVE ALEXANDER**

VAMPYR

1932/GERMANY/83 MIN
STARRING JULIAN WEST, MAURICE SCHUTZ AND RENA MANDEL
DIRECTED BY CARL THEODOR DREYER

Based ostensibly on Sheridan Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla*, Danish auteur Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1932 film *Vampyr* is a surprisingly modern work that continues to defy audience expectations. A largely silent film featuring limited dialogue and sound effects, *Vampyr* stars Julian West as Allan Grey, a student of the supernatural staying in a country inn. When he's suddenly awakened in the middle of the night by a stranger (Maurice Schutz) barging into his room, he cautiously follows the old man to his manor, where everyone appears to be under the influence of a vague but undeniably evil force.

Incorporating trance-like acting, a free-associative plot and diffused cinematography, the film is an unnerving spectacle of surreal and morbid imagery, including a skeletal hand holding a vial of poison, a dark figure with a scythe, a sinister medical doctor suffocated to death under a stream of ground flour. But even more unforgettable is Allan's waking dream in which he, paralyzed and mute, experiences his own funeral. Dreyer uses a lengthy POV shot to mimic the character's view through a small window in his coffin as he's loaded on a cemetery-bound cart, and then buried.

Less a chilling tale of good versus evil than an exercise in uncanny atmosphere, *Vampyr* uses simple special effects and ominous imagery to create a disorienting nightmare world that has provoked and disturbed audiences for more than 70 years. **PAUL CORUPE**

VAMPYRES

1975/UK/92 MIN
STARRING MARIANNE MORRIS
ANULKA DZIUBINSKA AND MURRAY BROWN
DIRECTED BY JOSE RAMON LARRAZ

Sapphic eroticism has been a component of vampire literature since Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 novella *Carmilla*, but overt depictions of lesbianism in vampire film didn't come into vogue until the early '70s, beginning with Hammer Studios' loose adaptation of *Carmilla*, *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), and subsequent

films by Jess Franco (*Vampyros Lesbos*, 1971) and Jean Rollin (*The Shiver of the Vampires*, 1971). This brief trend in sexploitation arguably climaxed with José Ramón Larraz's masterful *Vampyres*.

Marianne Morris and Anulka star as a pair of gorgeous lesbian vampires who roam the countryside around the abandoned estate where they make their lair, luring passing motorists to the mansion to seduce and feed upon them. One victim, Ted (Murray Brown), becomes a plaything they slowly drain, while a couple camping on the grounds become increasingly curious as to the strange comings and goings of the two women.

This is a wonderfully moody film that recalls the best of Hammer, juxtaposing a dreamlike atmosphere against moments of shocking and bloody violence, with director Larraz incorporating ample nudity and sex for a decidedly more decadent experience. British censors were suitably appalled. **THE GORE-MET**

THE VANISHING

1988/NETHERLANDS-FRANCE/107 MIN.
STARRING BERNARD-PIERRE DONNADIEU, JOHANNA TER STEEGE, AND GENE BERVOETS
DIRECTED BY GEORGE SLUIZER

This Dutch thriller has a premise that is so tantalizing, it risks becoming more memorable than anything in the film. While on a road trip, Rex (Gene Bervoets) and his girlfriend Saskia (Johanna ter Steege) stop at a gas station. Saskia goes into the store... and never returns.

Years later, Rex is still obsessed with trying to find out what happened, and even though he has moved on and is in a new relationship, he can't keep Saskia from his thoughts. Finally, he meets Raymond (Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu), the man who claims to have abducted his girlfriend and who offers a dangerous bargain: he'll show Rex what happened if Rex agrees to be drugged.

Brilliant concept. How far would you go to learn what happened to a long-missing loved one? The story serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of obsession and the preciousness of life, and in the end Rex pays a horrifying price. At the same time, the movie is a character study that offers a refreshing meditation on evil. Raymond considers himself a sociopath after rescuing a girl from drowning in a pool; his daughter considers him to be a hero, but he feels he could be equally capable of committing evil, hence the kidnapping plan.

The Vanishing, Vampyres

Vinyan

A 1993 Hollywood remake was predictably cynical, with director George Sluizer reshooting his movie and tacking on a different ending that retroactively made the entire story pointless. Avoid that version, the original is the one you want to watch. AARON VON LUPTON

VINYAN

2008/AUSTRALIA BELGIUM FRANCE UK/96 MIN
STARRING EMMANUELLE BEART, RUFUS SEWELL AND PETCH OSATHANUGRAH
DIRECTED BY FABRICE DU WELZ

On December 26, 2004, a massive tsunami washed away more than 225,000 victims across South Asia, leaving countless others displaced and destroying entire population centres. This harrowing event prompted Belgian filmmaker Fabrice du Welz (*Calvaire*) to go to Thailand and make a horror film that would explore the emotional devastation left in its wake.

Vinyan is an *Apocalypse Now* meets *Lord of the Flies* and *Don't Look Now* descent into a hellish jungle populated by malevolent spirits. It follows European couple Jeanne and Paul Belman (Emmanuelle Beart, Rufus Sewell), who are devastated by the loss of their son, Joshua. Six months after his disappearance in the tsunami, a clue emerges that he may still be alive in a remote village somewhere in Burma. The Belmans follow this lead beyond the point of reason, pushing deeper into the heart of darkness and battling terrors of the body and mind that include hostile terrain, underworld crime lords and a tribe of mysterious feral children.

Despite the dominating ghostly atmosphere, this is not another Asian ghost-in-the-well story. And its focus on Western tourists at the mercy of a foreign menace bears no resemblance to *Hostel*, *Turistas* or *The Ruins*. The film most closely related to *Vinyan* is the 1976 Spanish cult picture *Who Can Kill a Child?* by Narciso Ibanez Serrador, which inspired the film and shares a madness amidst killer kids plot. Du Welz gives us an unforgettable descent into the Green Hell, expertly blending real-life horror with movie surreal cinematic danger. It will leave you shaken. LISA LADOUCEUR

WAKE WOOD

2011/IRELAND/90 MIN
STARRING AIDAN GILLEN, EVA BIRTHISTLE AND TIMOTHY SPALL
DIRECTED BY DAVID KEATING

Be careful what you wish for – it's a classic warning, and this Hammer-produced take on "The Monkey's Paw" does it justice with an update to the tale of longing and resurrection.

The story focuses on a couple trying to cope with the horrific loss of their young daughter, Alice (Ella Connolly), who was ripped apart by a dog. Patrick

Wake Wood

(Alden Gillen), a veterinarian, and his wife Louise (Eva Birthistle), relocate to the village of Wake Wood to find peace and heal their crumbling marriage. At first, it seems like a picture postcard Irish village, but then they witness the locals – some holding strange instruments – march a young girl down the street. Then one night they stumble across the village performing a strange resurrection rite, during which the deceased is reborn from a cocoon.

With the cat out of the bag, village leader Arthur (Timothy Spall, Tim Burton's *Sweeney Todd*) offers the grieving parents a chance to see Alice one last time, for a period of three days. After making some grisly preparations, and ignoring warnings from some of the locals, they have Arthur bring her back. But the miraculous family reunion turns bad when animals, and people, start turning up dead.

Director David Keating and his co-writer Brendan McCarthy show us the right way to update a timeless story by channeling those classic, classy British chillers, where the quaint hides the devious. And though there are obvious shades of *The Wicker Man*, the story is more complex than that with its many moral gray areas. Smart, mysterious and heartbreaking, *Wake Wood* is a retro-styled rarity, and just the kinda of thing we wish for around here. **DAVE ALEXANDER**

THE WEREWOLF

1956/USA/79 MIN
STARRING STEVEN RITCH, DON MEGOWAN AND JOYCE HOLDEN
DIRECTED BY FRED F SEARS

After Universal's monster icons began showing up on the small screen but before Hammer reinvented them for the swinging '60s, some low-budget studios briefly managed to put their own unique spins on vampires, werewolves and gill-men. Prolific producer Sam Katzman's *The Werewolf* is one of the best – an engaging update of the mythic monster for the Cold War age. The action begins in the snowy mountains of Montana, as a series of brutal murders occurs in a small town after the arrival of apparent amnesiac Duncan Marsh (Steve Ritch). The straight-talking sheriff, Jack Haines (Don Megowan), isn't sure if the killings are being caused by man or beast, but after Marsh comes out of hiding in the woods and confesses that he isn't sure of who – or what – he is, Haines begins to suspect that the barroom gossip is

White Zombie

true and that a werewolf really is on the loose.

This smart take on the classic tale plays into the dominant fears of the atom bomb-paranoid 1950s, and features a transformation triggered by anger rather than the phases of the moon, making it a notable and disquieting change from Universal's trend-setting lycanthropy films *Werewolf of London* and *The Wolf Man*. Picturesque wintry locations add a natural, realistic feel to *The Werewolf*, but Ritch's thoughtful and tragic portrayal of Marsh is the film's heart and soul. A quiet sympathy shines through the thrifty wolf makeup, as he wakes up in caves covered in blood, hysterical at the thought of what he may have done.

PAUL CORUPE

WHITE ZOMBIE

1932/USA/68 MIN
STARRING BELA LUGOSI, MADGE BELLAMY AND JOSEPH CAWTHORN
DIRECTED BY VICTOR HALPERIN

Unlike the great Universal horror films of the 1930s, this independently produced Lugosi classic is a patchwork of literary influences, including Goethe's *Faust* (1808), George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), William Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929) and perhaps most evidently, Lugosi's own portrayal of Dracula in both the 1931 film and the long-running stage play.

Widely regarded as the first "zombie" film, *White Zombie* stars Charles Frazer as a wealthy landowner named Beaumont who strikes a deal with a voodoo master named Legendre (Lugosi) to help him win the heart of the beautiful Madeline (Madge Bellamy). Only problem is, she's engaged to the blithering Neil, who's played to melodramatic extremes by the forgettable John Harron. On her wedding night, Beaumont slips her some "zombie powder," then using a bizarre combination of voodoo doll theatrics, evil eye mesmerism and his infamous "zombie grip," Legendre sends Madeline into a death-like trance. After a quick funeral, Legendre's zombies snatch her from the tomb and whisk her away to his castle, where the amorous Beaumont tries unsuccessfully to seduce her. As is often the case with Faustian pacts, Beaumont gets a lot more than he bargains for – or in this case, a lot less, as Madeline is practically catatonic. Meanwhile, Neil teams up with Dr. Bruner (Joseph Cawthorn) to journey to the "land of the living dead" to try to put an end to Legendre's zombie-making shenanigans.

Even though *White Zombie* boasts some of the most elegant visual sequences of any American horror film of the 1930s, it's ultimately Lugosi who steals the show, channeling everything from Mephistopheles, Death, Svengali to Count Dracula himself, especially with his penetrating stare. This is why Legendre remains one of the legendary actor's greatest performances – because no one else could have possibly played the part. STUART F. ANDREWS

WHO CAN KILL A CHILD?

1976/SPAIN/107 MIN
STARRING LEWIS FIANDER
PRUNELLA RANSOME AND ANTONIO IRANZO
DIRECTED BY NARCISO IBÁNEZ SERRADOR

This Spanish chiller is one of the most heart-wrenching and scathing anti-war parables to be found within the horror genre. After a harrowing seven-minute opening credit sequence culled from documentary footage of war and political atrocities sets the unrelenting and superbly maintained nihilistic tone, we're introduced to a British couple, Tom (Lewis Fiander) and his pregnant wife Evelyn (Prunella Ransome), who have left their children behind to take a quiet holiday on a small island off the coast of Spain. After puttering into the harbour of a small fishing village in a rented boat, they find it all but deserted, save for a few local children. They explore the village, looking for food and lodgings, but the only adults they encounter have been brutally murdered. Tom then witnesses a young girl beating an old man to death with his cane and a group of children using his corpse as a macabre piñata, and the fate of the adult population becomes gruesomely apparent. The murderous rampage isn't over, though, and Tom and Evelyn are swiftly caught up in a deadly fight for survival, during which they face the fundamental moral dilemma of the title: who can kill a child?

The unrelenting darkness sticks around all the way through to the film's downbeat ending, which owes no small debt to *Night of the Living Dead*. Instead of zombies, however, these hopelessly isolated antagonists square off against ruthless rugrats. **THE GORE-MET**

WITCHFINDER GENERAL

1968/UK/87 MIN
STARRING VINCENT PRICE, IAN OGILVY
AND HILARY DWYER
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL REEVES

It's sad to consider what Michael Reeves may have achieved had a barbiturates overdose not ended his life at the tender age of 25. On the strength of *Witchfinder General*, his third and final offering, it's safe to say that he had already matured into one of the genre's most dynamic creative forces.

Set in the year 1645, when England was being torn asunder by Civil War and religious superstition, Reeves' studious swan song reworks the historical story of Matthew Hopkins (Vincent Price), a sadistic opportunist who ritually exploits this climate of uncertainty by traversing the countryside, torturing and killing alleged witches for profit and pleasure. But when he executes a village priest (Ruperf Davies), Hopkins initiates a blood feud with a young Parliamentary soldier (Ian Ogilvy) who is betrothed to the holy man's niece (Hilary Dwyer), which may end up destroying one or both of them.

Upon its release, *Witchfinder General* was excoriated by critics as a sadistic exercise in gratuity with "no explicit message." That Reeves' movie is actually one of the most bold and thoughtful of its age – and a savage indictment of religious hypocrisy and the contaminating effects of violence to boot – makes such ill-considered "insights" difficult to accept.

Aged just 23 when he shot the film, Reeves is in complete control of his medium. Although his fastidious attention to authentic period detail does not extend to some of the historical facts present in the script, his Hopkins is the humdrum face of institutional evil, as unflinching in the discharge of his duties as Reeves' is the execution of his devastating climax. Simply a masterpiece. **MICHAEL DOYLE**

Witchfinder General

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